A tall, weathered rock formation, possibly a natural sea stack or a remnant of a structure, stands prominently on a dark, rocky shore. The rock is covered in patches of moss and lichen, showing its age and exposure to the elements. In the background, the deep blue ocean stretches to the horizon under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is serene and evokes a sense of ancient history and natural beauty.

A Guide to PREHISTORIC AND VIKING SHETLAND

Noel Fojut

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Preface

This small book outlines the life of prehistoric communities in Shetland, taking the interested amateur from the earliest traces of human habitation to the Norse settlement. It draws upon field evidence in the form of visible remains, and utilises excavation evidence to fill out the picture. Some four thousand years cannot be covered in detail in a small space, nor indeed is there enough informatin to attempt a difinitive treatise. Rather, the purpose is twofold. Firstly, various types of prehistoric structure found in Shetland are described and explained, and examples given of each: this is therefore a visitor's guide. Secondly, this booklet gives a basis for the potential student who knows little or nothing about Shetland, by outlining the present state of our knowledge concerning the prehistoric period in the islands.

This booklet examines two questions: what was Shetland's past, and where can the evidence be seen. The first section is a description and discussion of the main phases in the development of prehistoric society, as archaeologists at present understand it. This is followed by a selective gazetteer of sites worth visiting: enough are described to keep the average visitor happy for some time, and to give the more enthusiastic explorer a good idea of the range of sites to be found.

But this is not meant to be a final statement of how things were in prehistoric times. We have little evidence, and understand less of what we know. There are yawning gaps in our knowledge of early life, and periods of many centuries are without any firmly dated information. So many generalisations will be made here, and it is the author's hope that readers will think about what they see, and go on to expand and deepen our understanding of society in those remote times. An outline is presented here which is but the partly articulated skeleton of the truth. It is for others to find the flesh, and re-arrange the bones, which will eventually produce a convincing body.

The author wishes to thank all Shetlanders who helped by providing information and assistance, especially the denizens of Lerwick Museum, Andrew Williamson, Tom Henderson and Peter Moar, who have spent years telling archaeologists those very things they are now discovering.

Many professional colleagues have provided unpublished information relating to their own research work, in particular Peter Winham, Raymond Lamb, Alasdair Whittle, John Hedges and the staff of North of Scotland Archaeological Services, Orkney. Last and not least, thanks go to *The Shetland Times* and to Paula Love, the author's wife, for encouragement at every stage.

Glasgow, 1981

Preface to Second Edition

Since this booklet first appeared, there have been a number of significant events, with excavations at Scatness, Eastshore, Breckon and Kebister, while more information on earlier digs and surveys has been published. The full potential of Shetland's archaeology is now dimly perceived on a wider basis, and the time seems right for a reappraisal. The number of individuals who have assisted is legion, but especial thanks are due to Brian Smith, Pat and Neil Thomson of Fair Isle and Patrick Ashmore, John Barber, Mike Brooks and Olwyn Owen, of SDD (HBM).

Peebles, 1986.

Introduction: The Physical Background

Geographical accident and geological history have conspired to produce in Shetland an environment which is unique, on a large scale, in Britain, providing for Man a territory which, if habitable, is often barely so. On the edge of the coastal shelf, the island chain lies at the junction of North Sea and Atlantic Ocean, and the oceanic climate which banishes long winter frosts is instrumental in keeping summer temperatures moderate. In a regime of adequate rainfall, with fairly equable temperatures, long summer days allow reasonable crops to be raised, while the short days of winter make for a dead season. The main obstacle to farming is the wind, both through its own effect as an agent of growth inhibition and as a carrier for a heavy load of fine particles of salt, picked up from the spray on the many coastal skerries and cliffs. Where this spray is most dense, along the exposed clifftops, nothing can grow but a mat of wiry grass and sea-pink, while even inland its effects are never absent, except where the force of the wind is broken by the drystone dykes so typical of rural Shetland.

The land itself is but the upper portion of a submerged chain of hills, parallel ridges of rock running north to south and accentuated by millions of years of erosion into a landscape of long, whale-backed hills, with narrow valleys. Deposition during the Ice Age resulted in much of the land being poorly drained, and erosion steepened some of the cliffs, but by and large Shetland retains its pre-glacial form. Land and water are inextricably entangled, for not only do long, drowned, valleys reach deep into the land but the surface is scattered with thousands of small lochs, marshes and streams, so that an apparently short journey may become a major undertaking.

This, and the fact that the land is split up into fragments, four main and about five hundred small islands (only sixteen are now permanently inhabited), has led to the truism that the typical Shetlander is a "fisherman with a croft" rather than "a crofter with a boat" as is true in nearby Orkney. Only in recent years has the sea ceased to be the medium

of inter-community transport: in 1781, a resident of Nesting could say "The roads, bridges, etc., are in the same state here as in every other part of Shetland; that is to say, there are none".

It has been the sea which, after bringing in the first and subsequent settlers, has allowed survival in years of poor harvest caused by late springs, wet summers and tempestuous autumns, which are all too frequent. Fish are, and were, abundant, both around the shores and in deeper waters, and such creatures as seals, whales, otters and seabirds have been exploited, often at great risk, from earliest days, while more static resources such as seabird eggs, seaweed and algae have always been welcome.

Behind the shoreline (which is slowly being submerged) lies the land. For the most part this is a bleak, rock-strewn landscape of heather and sedge, growing over deep peat, broken in places by signs of man's long perseverance in the form of green patches of improved pasture. Tilled fields are generally few, small, and prone to waterlogging. Formerly, more land was cultivated, and traces of early agriculture are everywhere: indeed, as will be seen, the whole history of Shetland seems to show a decline in arable farming from early days onwards. Small bands of limestone have provided the most fertile soils, while localised areas of sand-accumulation behind beaches have allowed some extensive agriculture, although at the risk of catastrophic erosion, as around Quendale Bay. The higher ridges, hills and moors lie under a desolate blanket of peat, which has formed from centuries of accumulating vegetation debris. Trees are few, but the occasional clumps of scrub willow and birch on isolated holms and inaccessible cliffs point to a greater former extent, and crofters cutting peat sometimes come across quite substantial thicknesses of timber, indicating that the present treeless landscape may not be original, but the result of a combination of grazing and soil deterioration. Large trees now present have been planted and carefully protected: even in prehistoric times driftwood seems to have been used in great quantities, so trees may never have been very large or numerous.


The coastal lands merit a closer examination, for it has surely been here, where farms meet the fishing grounds, that much of Shetland life has been lived since the earliest days. Shetland, together with the west coast of the Outer Hebrides, is unusual in northern Britain in having a coastline which is very slowly sinking, rather than rising. The weight of ice imposed on Scotland during the Ice Age depressed central areas while forcing up the periphery, including Shetland. Now that the ice has gone,

the land is restoring its balance, so that central areas are rising while the edges sink. It is estimated that Shetland has been sinking at an average of over one metre per thousand years. The effects on the coastline vary. On the outer coast, rock-fringed cliffs were steepened by the ice, and in places are now being eroded, at the south end of Bressay, for example. Most cliffs, however, are fairly stable, as witness the grassed-over rubble lying at the foot of such headlands as Herma Ness. Behind the rampart of the great cliffs lie two further types of shore. The first is a coast of low, rugged, rocky slopes, with low cliffs broken by small bays, typified by the shores of Sandness or Nesting. The second is the coast found around the long voes, where storm waves lose their force to break on gentle slopes which run down to, and under, the sea.

The slow sinking of the land, combined with ice erosion, has resulted in a plentiful supply of sand and shingle, which the waves have built up into an array of beaches, some of curious form, like the bayhead and baymouth bars of Dales Voe, or the bar which links St Ninian's Isle to the shore. Behind some of the larger beaches great spreads of sand have built up, as material blown from the foreshore has been trapped and stabilised by the roots of coarse grasses. These areas have provided fertile grazing, and where not too deep can be cultivated, but are always prone to blow-outs when their seaward faces are broken by over-grazing or careless removal of sand.

Areas around Jarlshof and Quendale, in the south, and Breckon, in Yell have suffered repeatedly from blown sand, which can sterilise large areas of farmland and bury houses. But the attraction of these areas for settlers is shown by the constant renewal of half-buried villages at Jarlshof. Shetlanders early became hardened to occasional disaster in their bid to carve out a living.

Despite the first impression of rugged cliffs and barren moors, the true Shetland, that of the people, is that gentler coast around the sheltered voes, where long-worked fields run down to a small strip of shingle, and boats can be drawn above the waves. And it is on shores such as these that we find the first traces of man in Shetland — a settler embarking upon a five thousand year struggle against wind and wave, seeking a living amongst bare hills and in poor soils, at the end of the settled world.



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Prehistoric Shetland

First Settlers

Anywhere else in Scotland this account could begin with the Mesolithic period, during which small, semi-nomadic groups moved along the coastline and up the river valleys, hunting animals such as the red deer and exploiting the resources of river and shore. The blades of flint which formed the tools of these people have been found as far north as Caithness, but are not known from Shetland. It may be that the islands were uninhabited at this period, or that Mesolithic hunters did reach this far north, but no evidence has since been discovered.

There can have been no real obstacle to enterprising groups of hunter-fishermen moving north, for they possessed boats capable of reaching the Western Isles. It is possible that Orkney and Shetland were explored and found largely lacking in the necessities of life, for the sparseness of the vegetation and the lack of large land animals may have precluded permanent use of the islands in the nomadic life cycle. If Mesolithic man did settle in Shetland, it is likely that his encampments would have been beside the shore. The subsequent rise in sea-level of more than nine metres would have submerged any possible remains: little would be known of the West Coast Mesolithic but for the gradual falling of sea-level in that area, which has preserved the shell-mounds characteristic of this period. The question of whether or not there was a pre-agrarian settlement of Shetland may never be resolved, but for the present we must accept that the earliest traces of man belong to a culture with a very different way of life.

By about 3000 BC groups of early farmers, belonging to the stage termed the Neolithic, were established in Shetland around Sumburgh and Lerwick, and presumably elsewhere. One of the fascinating aspects of this early settlement is that we do not know when it began. The earliest dates are from a burial at Sumburgh, presumably made by people already established in the islands by the latter part of the fourth millennium BC. At Ward of Shurton, behind Lerwick, the early dates came from below a boundary wall, which would not be a likely first construction by settlers in a land with no natural predators. Similarly, at Scord of Brouster the

earliest dates come from the second of the houses built there, which overlaid the traces of an earlier wooden house. However, such is the nature of archaeology that it would be surprising if we did find the earliest evidence in our rather haphazard investigations.

More significant is the fact that, by the time we do have evidence, the culture of the Shetlanders, as represented by manmade objects, had already developed distinct differences from that of their southern neighbours. The earliest pottery has a style clearly related to that found at later Orcadian settlements (Rinyo, Skara Brae and Noltland), but is nevertheless fairly distinctive. Early houses, too, show certain common features with Orkney, but are quite clearly the product of a different area, being oval, rather than round or sub-rectangular, and built in a style which takes account of differences in materials. This all points to the fact that Shetland was settled long enough before our earliest evidence for these peculiarities to have developed as a response to local conditions and materials. For all we know, the earliest houses may have sunk below the sea, or been quarried by later builders, but we can guess that they would have been constructed about 3500 BC, and by either descendants or contemporaries of the early settlers of Orkney. It would not have taken these settlers long to develop the insular styles which have marked Shetlanders ever since.

Who were these early farmers? The weight of evidence indicates that they were family-sized groups descended from members of a general immigration into northern Britain around 4000 BC. The possible ancestors of the early Shetlanders, a mixture of early hunter-gatherers and immigrant farmers, were established on Deeside by the early years of the fourth millennium BC, and probably reached Orkney not much later. From there it was a short step to Shetland.

The first settlers brought with them the technology of farming. Grain was known, both barley and wheat (though only barley is evidenced from Shetland). Oats arrived later. The tools of early cultivation, ancestors to spade and plough, must have arrived at the same time as grain. Sheep and cattle arrived early, for their bones are present in early settlement sites, with cattle apparently providing the bulk of the meat. Implements for spinning and weaving wool, and dressing skins, would have arrived as well. The pig is probably a later introduction, and this animal, originally a woodland creature, never seems to have been at home in Shetland as it was elsewhere in the north. It cannot be doubted that other items arrived of which we have no evidence, such as green crops like goosefoot and sorrel and, of course, the dog would have come as companion and helper to the earliest sheep — and cattle — herders.

How was this varied load of imports carried? The only British boats known from this period are clumsy dug-out canoes, hard to handle and incapable of carrying any useful load. However, there were probably much larger boats built, on the pattern of the Irish curragh, from skins over a wooden frame. Such vessels would also have served as roofing for the first shelters erected by the immigrants, a use of obsolete boats still practised in Shetland to the present day. Some fine modern examples can be seen around Ulsta and Brough, in Yell, although the boats used now are much more heavily built than those suggested for the Neolithic.

There is a possibility that, whenever these people arrived, they came in some strength, rather than gradually building up their numbers over centuries. The reason for this suggestion is that where there is extensive visible evidence for early agriculture, as in the West Mainland, the land seems to have been clearly delineated by substantial walls which run across country for long distances, cutting the countryside into large units, which are then subdivided by lesser field boundaries. This apparently early concern with land division seems to indicate that people were present, or expected, in quite sizeable numbers at an early date.

Many remote parts of upland Britain bear traces of early settlement in the form of walls, fields and houses, most particularly where subsequent growth and later removal of peat have helped to preserve remains. It seems likely that this vestigial evidence represents patterns of land use once common to most of Britain, but since lost in the areas under later farms. Shetland, together with Dartmoor at the opposite extreme of Britain, and Western Ireland, provides some of the best of this early evidence. Surprisingly, the fact that there were numerous Neolithic or Bronze Age remains in Shetland, other than burial cairns, escaped notice until about 1940. So most of what is known about life in the Neolithic is the result of the work of a few dedicated investigators since the Second World War. Excavations have been few in number, and fieldwork provides most of our knowledge.

The best area in which to see Neolithic remains is the West Mainland. From Loch of Grunnavoe north, via Bridge of Walls, Voxterby and Sulma Water to the sea, a distance of six miles, there is always some item of this period in view, be it a burial cairn, a series of field walls or a ruined farmhouse. Small mounds of stones cleared from early fields lie everywhere, and often close inspection of these will produce early stone plough-shares, discarded after damage while ploughing. Nor is this the only part of Shetland, for in addition to remains throughout Walls and Sandness, extensive traces of early

agriculture can be seen in Nesting, Aithsting, Delting and Northmavine (particularly around Mavis Grind), and also in the more remote parts of Yell and Whalsay. Anywhere that peat is being cut is worth investigating (taking care not to damage peat banks), for a single hour's walk over Wadbister, on the road north from Lerwick, once revealed six lengths of walling, an enclosure, a burial chamber and a possible house. That so much does survive is mainly due to the growth of peat from the later Neolithic onwards, which buried the ruins of early farms. It is no coincidence that it is in those parts of Shetland where recent peat-cutting has been most extensive that these remains are most evident.

Although the human landscape is complex, it can, for the sake of convenience, be broken down into elements: houses and other formerly roofed structures; clearance cairns; field dykes and major boundary dykes. In addition are many larger cairns, some with burial chambers, which are a product of other than economic activity. And finally, we must consider the hidden evidence, revealed by excavation, of crops, livestock and tools.

About 160 houses have so far been firmly identified in the style which goes by the clumsy name of Neolithic-Bronze Age. This ungainly name is outdated, for we now know that such houses were in use into the Iron Age. A typical house ruin is a low oval bank of rubble with a hollow centre. The central hollow may show traces of alcoves around each side, and a depression at one end, marking the entrance, may be visible. The inner ends of the entrance, and the projections between alcoves, may be formed by massive upright blocks ("orthostats"). Overall dimensions are in the order of ten metres by seven, but vary greatly. Often the foundations of houses occur in small groups, with associated field walls running off across the surrounding landscape.

Excavations at Ness of Gruting, Gruting School, Stanydale, Sumburgh and Scord of Brouster have given us a good idea of the construction of these houses. Walls are thick, faced with heavy stones and cored with rubble and earth, a technique used until recently all over the Highlands and Islands. The interior had two distinct levels. A central area, lower than the rest, generally held a large hearth, upon which peat was burned. Small, stone-lined drains ran from this area out under the entrance. Alcoves around the inside of the house wall were set higher, sometimes with raised sills and usually with paved floors. These alcoves have been interpreted as bed-recesses.

In the course of excavation and field observation, two classes of oval house have been identified. One is as described above, while the

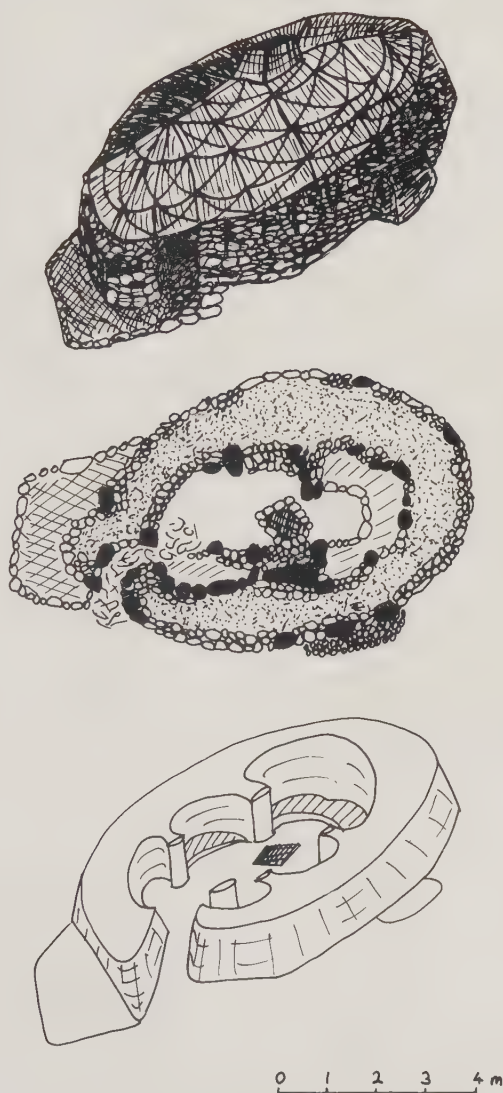


Figure 1

Reconstruction, from plan, of a typical prehistoric house (based on excavations at Ness of Gruting)

other, which is less frequently noted, has an oval form lacking alcoves but provided instead with small oval cells in the thickness of the wall. Houses of both types often have a curving wall outside the entrance, a porch, which would be essential in windy Shetland. As only foundations remain, reconstruction of the form of these houses is tentative, but the evidence of post-holes and parallels with later structures of similar type allow us to assume that these early examples had low walls with a heather and sod roof, pitched at a low angle and arranged on the walltop in such a fashion that water drained from the roof into the wall-core (see Figure 1). Far from rendering the house damp, this continual wetting of the core of the wall would have been essential to keeping it windproof. Dry-stone masonry, paradoxically, needs to be damp to remain in good repair, otherwise it crumbles rapidly. The houses would have been low and dark, and doubtless smokey. Most daily tasks would have taken place around the outside of the house, with the inhabitants perhaps sitting on the doorstep in rainy weather to chip out quartz implements or knead clay for pottery.

It is not yet known whether groups of houses represent true villages or are the remains of a succession of houses, each built upon the disuse of the previous one. The evidence from Brouster suggests the latter. They are normally sited near to fresh water, but generally stand some distance from the sea shore, being most characteristically behind the best land, as seen from the sea. This makes sense, as it is not economical to build houses upon the best farmland. These houses are found in higher and more exposed locations than more recent settlement, and this may support the suggestion that the climate was rather better in the Neolithic, and deteriorated thereafter.

Around the houses, and sometimes at considerable distances from them, may be found mounds of medium-sized stones. These often lie part-buried in the peat, and may show no more than a small patch of stones, yet on excavation have proved to reach diameters of three metres and more, and heights of over one metre. These cairns represent the result of many generations of field clearance, and are characteristically sorted, with the larger stones towards the base. This represents the pattern of ploughing, with the large stones removed early in the process, and then smaller stones being removed once the land was broken in to cultivation. It seems likely that poor land management and a deteriorating climate may have resulted in eventual impoverishment of the soil, for where pre-agricultural soils have survived below cairns and walls of houses, these are much deeper and richer than the thin, acid soils

which characterise most of the upper hillslopes today. Indeed, this may in turn have hastened the growth of peat on waterlogged soils, so that early man may have inadvertently helped to create the conditions which have preserved his remains to the present day.

Running among the cairns are stretches of low walling, which appear to split the land up into small fields of irregular shape. These often link cairns together, so as to leave the maximum plantable area clear. Excavation of these has shown that, while they may link pre-existing cairns, sometimes they are earlier, and cairns are later built up along their length. Their foundations vary greatly in thickness, and most cannot have stood high enough to provide a stockproof wall, especially against the Shetland sheep, which can easily clear six feet when frightened. Perhaps these walls served a dual function of dividing patches of land worked by different persons and of absorbing odd stones found during cultivation: they are partly land divisions and partly linear clearance cairns. As in the cairns, the larger stones occur towards the base.

In a rather different category are large dykes which run semi-continuously across country for miles. Some of these are very substantial and run almost straight, apparently aligned with hilltops or cairns. The stones used may be very large indeed, and because of their solid nature many of these walls have survived, used as boundaries between scattalds (township grazing lands). Good examples can be seen to the north of the Walls road just beyond Bridge of Walls, and south of the Sandness road just beyond Scord of Brouster. A particularly intriguing example runs from the settlement at Brouster north-east into a bog, reappears from the far side and then runs up the hill into the distance. Further evidence for the early date of these dykes is that where they run past areas of cultivation associated with oval house ruins, they are frequently seen to predate the field dykes, which run up the large dykes and stop, sometimes being continued on the far side after a displacement of some metres. The largest example is the Funzie Girt, on Fetlar, which divides the moorland of the north of that island.

The major dykes partition the landscape into irregular areas, each around one square mile in extent. These dykes may have served to split up the islands among early groups of settlers. Their location on shoulders and ridges certainly makes them look more like boundaries than field walls, although they may link the upper walls of land which was cleared early in the settlement process. They very clearly postdate some of the hilltop cairns. It seems, then, that the Neolithic settlers of Shetland

realised, not long after they had arrived, that sufficient people would be coming to make a division of the islands into territories not only desirable but essential. This implies that there was a substantial population, perhaps several thousands or as many as ten thousand persons, and that these people were using most of the land in an organised fashion. The New Stone Age was not, as is sometimes assumed by non-archaeologists, a period of ignorance, but was in fact characterised by organised agriculture and, as will be seen, an organised religion and great skill in the manufacture of objects, both for utilitarian and ornamental purposes.

As noted already, the earliest date from Shetland comes from a burial place, and for many years the chambered cairns were all that had been recognised in the way of Neolithic structures in the area. This concern for the dead of the community enables us to reconstruct something of the less tangible side of prehistory, the beliefs and observances of Neolithic man. Indirectly, burial practices give evidence about social structure and, where gifts are placed with the dead, material culture.

Two methods of burial are known from Neolithic Shetland. That which has left the most noticeable remains is the practice of inhumation in stone-built chambers below large cairns of stone. Less well known is the practice of burial in stone boxes, or cists, made of large flat slabs, but not provided with any permanent surface marker. It was formerly thought that cists, in which pottery of Bronze Age type has been found on some occasions, were uniformly of later date than cairns, with a transition marked by the construction of small round cairns over cist burials. While a good number of cists do seem to belong to the Bronze Age, or even later times, recent excavations at Sumburgh have shown that collective burials were being made in massive cists from the outset. In fact the first chambered cairns may be somewhat later in date.

However, the many cairns, which occupy prominent positions on tops or shoulders of hills, are somewhat better studied. Of the long cairns such as are found in Orkney, only one example is known, and this is sadly reduced to a jumble of stones. A second example is suspected, but has not been investigated. The common form of chambered cairn in the islands is almost unique to Shetland, with a very few examples elsewhere in the north. This is the heel-shaped cairn, so called because of its plan, which resembles the heel of a shoe in being oval, with a concave facade cutting into one end. From the centre of this facade, which is more carefully built than the rest of the cairn, a narrow passage leads into the

burial chamber, which is commonly sub-rectangular, with one or two small alcoves opening from the main area. The roof of the main chamber is generally formed by corbelling, while alcoves and entrance passage are lintelled. (See Figure 2).

One of the remarkable facts about these cairns is their range of size, from the massive piles of Punds Water, Vementry and Daney's Loch to the miniature versions such as that at Pettigarth's Field. Diameters vary from twenty to under four metres. The largest cairns seem to have been built in two stages, with the provision of a round cairn above the burial chamber followed by the construction of the elaborate facade. Unlike many cairns in more southerly parts, the facades seem to have been added at a time when the burial chambers were still open, and we may be looking at original planned shapes rather than the results of a series of modifications. Against this general pattern can be set the puzzling March Cairn, in Eshaness, where the chamber was entered by a passage which opened from one of the sides which did not have a facade.

The concave facade of the Shetland cairns has been found to occur in a number of the oval houses also, notably at the site now destroyed by airport extensions at Sumburgh. It is possible that the cairns were copying a common house style, or vice versa. At Sumburgh the facade was added to an existing house. Certainly the scanty fragments of pottery from cairns match closely those from excavated houses, thus supporting a similar date.

Both cists and cairns imply some measure of special treatment, for there can never have been enough of these burial places for everyone who died to be placed inside. This is even more the case with the cists sealed below cairns, where numbers were strictly limited, than it was with chambered cairns, which could be used as long as they were left open. The simple, albeit gruesome, expedient of shovelling up the remains of earlier burials, to make way for the new occupant, is known from chambered tombs elsewhere. In some cases the bones seem to have been carefully bagged and stowed away in a side recess. There is no doubt that, even if tombs were cleared periodically, only a small proportion of the population can have been laid to rest in such style. Presumably most bodies were deposited, without burial chamber or memorial, into the ground, although bodies may have been cremated or disposed of at sea.

We have no way of knowing why certain individuals were selected for burial in cairns. They may have been members of a ruling class or family, a priestly elect, or individuals linked by some more tenuous trait, perhaps a "propitious" time of birth or an unfortunate combination of

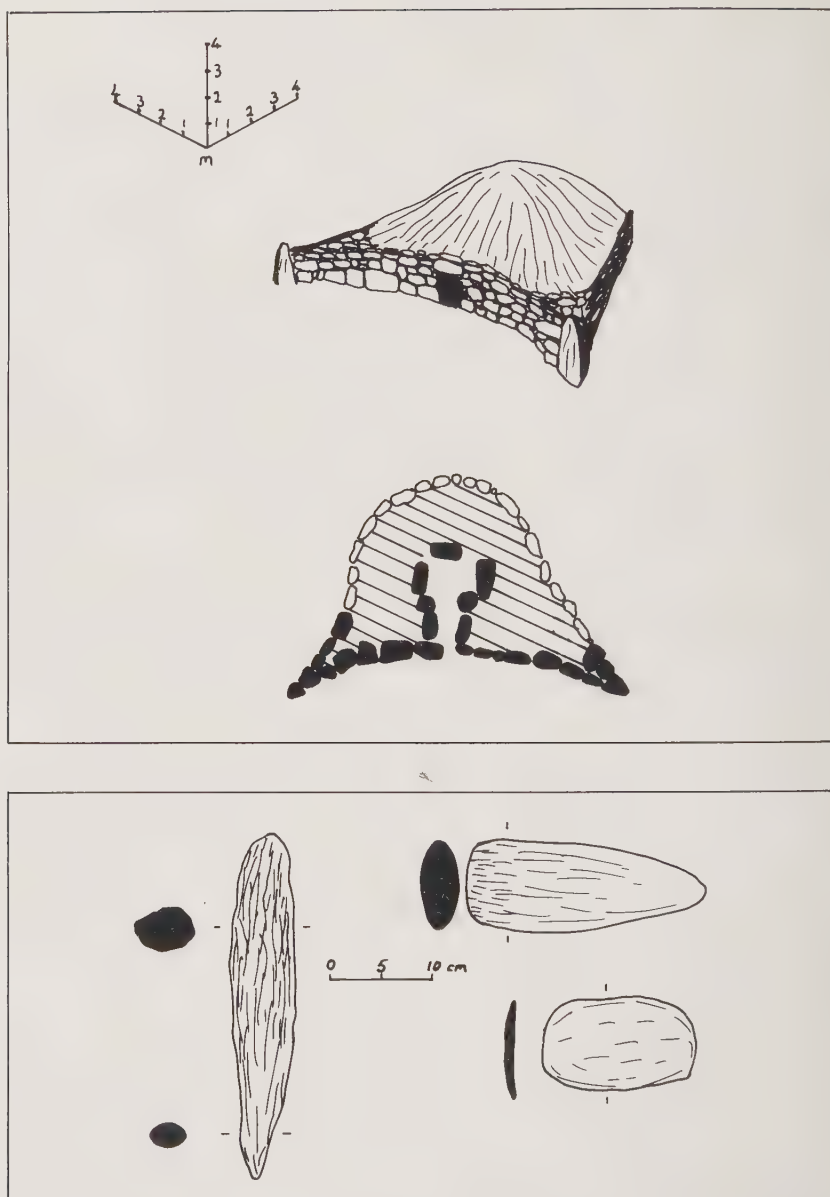


Figure 2
A heel-shaped cairn (based on ruins at Islesburgh), plus some prehistoric
artefacts

physical features. Work outside Shetland has shown that cairns may contain a wide range of ages and members of both sexes. As yet no convincing “family likenesses” have been recognised in the individuals buried in any tomb. The only clear fact which emerges is that some tombs were in use for centuries and this must mean that few members of any one generation could have been interred in the chamber, supporting the idea of a quite exclusive elite. Unfortunately, little evidence is forthcoming from Shetland, for bone does not survive well here due to acid soil conditions, and most cairn excavations took place before techniques for finding fragmentary bone remains were well developed.

To continue the theme of a select class or group within Neolithic society, mention must be made of the so-called temples identified at Yoxie (Whalsay) and Stanydale (West Mainland). These were categorised as temples on the grounds of similarity of plan with known temples in Malta, and excavated in the not too distant days when all innovations in British prehistory were held to have come from the Mediterranean region. About Yoxie nothing needs to be said, for continued identification of early houses has shown that the plan of Yoxie is repeated in many other sites, and that the “forecourt” of the “temple” is nothing but a windbreak at the door of a very ordinary house.

Stanydale, however, is a wholly different case (Plate 1). This site, now partially restored, is a house of normal plan, with the usual alcoves, and a very carefully built concave facade flanking the entrance, as at Sumburgh. The remarkable feature of Stanydale is its size: it is about twice as large as any other known house, measuring no less than thirteen metres by six internally. The finds from the excavation include fragments of very large pottery vessels of late Neolithic type, smaller fragments of early Bronze Age “breaker” pottery and some tools of typical late Neolithic form. Most notable, perhaps, were two features. Firstly, there were few of the ubiquitous rough stone artefacts associated with normal houses. Secondly, the structure was apparently roofed, and the roof was supported on two central posts of considerable thickness made of spruce, a tree not native to Scotland, and growing at that time only in Scandinavia and North America.

Clearly, Stanydale, if not a temple in the strict sense, must be an important structure of some sort, and its size, and the use of massive timbers (which would be rare as driftwood, and therefore valuable), together with the general absence of agricultural implements, suggests a community enterprise. Perhaps it is a temple, perhaps a village hall. Archaeology cannot as yet deal properly with such questions.

The most puzzling aspect of all is not the existence of Stanydale, but the absence of corresponding structures in any other area rich in early remains. Stanydale stands even more apart in the Neolithic than Mousa in the Iron Age.

Looking at the remains of houses, farms, burial places and gathering places, together with their associated cairns and dykes, it will be seen that the early farmers who peopled Shetland lived an orderly life, apparently agreeing land divisions, were well equipped with crops and domestic animals, and seem to have had a respect for at least some of the dead. Their chambered tombs and such structures as Stanydale argue for a society organised sufficiently to make large building projects feasible, and this in turn gives support to the notion of some form of a ruling or directing class. Archaeology cannot demonstrate whether this class gained power through skill, knowledge, descent or martial prowess; once again, a tantalising problem seems irresolvable.

Early Craftsmen

Although it is the ruins of structures built for daily use which are the most immediately obvious early items in Shetland, much of our knowledge has been gained from the study of tools, utensils and ornaments, items which archaeologists group under the name “artefacts”, meaning objects fashioned by man. While many features of early architecture in Shetland are hard to parallel elsewhere, comparison of artefacts allows us to suggest links with other parts of the north. Before the invention of radiocarbon dating, these objects provided the only reasonably accurate means of dating the different phases of prehistory. The best known example of this technique is the well-known “Three Ages” system: Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. While this makes a useful framework for study, it is now realised that such divisions are never hard and fast, particularly in areas such as Shetland, far from the regions of southern Britain where these periods were first defined.

The materials available elsewhere in Britain were all available to Shetlanders. There was ample clay for pottery, stone was abundant (including types which could be split and polished), wood was locally available, at least in pieces large enough to make tools, and bone would have been plentiful in the semi-pastoral economy which has always been practised in the islands. Added to these relatively long-surviving materials were such impermanent substances as leather, heather and straw. Anyone who doubts the importance of the last two items should

examine recent work in them in the Lerwick Museum. And, Shetland being Shetland, we can assume that wool was an important product, and would have provided most of the clothing of the inhabitants.

Because of the poor environment for preservation, only stone, pottery, some bone and a little wood survive from these pre-metal-using times. These are the materials which are found in excavations, and as chance finds. It is necessary to remember that all of the artefacts we study have survived the intervening millennia, and must, to be noticed, be recognisably manmade. This means we are looking at only a portion of the equipment of the well-provided Neolithic Shetlander, for we cannot study what has been destroyed or what has gone unnoticed. Many of the objects collected have been made with more care than was necessary for utility alone, and may therefore have had values in excess of the purely functional. There can be no doubt that there were, in the Neolithic as now, disposable tools; pebbles split to provide a sharp edge to gut a fish, or bones splintered to bore holes in leather or wood. Such items are not normally found, for they can only be identified by microscopic examination, and this cannot be carried out on every fragment recovered from an archaeological excavation.

Pottery is very important in archaeological studies, because changing styles can help to assign sites to specific periods. All Shetland's prehistoric pottery is hand-made, for the potter's wheel does not seem to have been introduced here until recently. Early pottery was made by building up coils of clay upon a flat base, and then smoothing the pot before decoration and firing. It tends to be gritty and coarse, and may pass unnoticed by the untrained eye. Vessels vary in size and form, but are basically the sort of storage jars and bowls which would be useful around the farm kitchen. Some of the decorative motifs suggest links with Orkney, although Shetland pottery seems to have lost little time in developing a character of its own. So far as we know, Neolithic people in the islands did not make special vessels to accompany burials in cists or cairns. This was a practice which began later, perhaps between 2000 and 1500 BC when the thin-walled, highly decorated vase forms called "beakers" appear.

Containers were also made out of steatite, a fibrous rock which can easily be shaped with stone tools, although metal implements would have been more efficient. This rock occurs in a number of places in Shetland and was worked to produce carved vessels and ornaments, and small chips of steatite were used as a filler in pottery clays. An alternative name for steatite is soapstone, because of its greasy feel and shiny surface. These

properties were attractive to early potters, for clay containing steatite can be polished to a high gloss. By the end of the Neolithic, pottery containing steatite was to be found many miles from the nearest rock outcrop, raising the questions of whether it travelled by trade or through collection and whether it was moved in the form of raw rock or fired pots. There can be little doubt that all Neolithic Shetlanders were capable of obtaining access to the full range of resources of the islands, no matter where they lived.

While pottery can be hard to identify, especially after it has weathered, and bone and wooden artefacts, even if preserved, are similarly elusive, stone tools are often easy to recognise, and thus it is that the majority of chance finds from this period are stone artefacts. The earliest tools found in Shetland are very basic in concept. At Jarlshof, split pebbles were used as knives at the start of the occupation of the site, but these were soon replaced by a whole range of tools made from the local slate, which splits readily to provide flat blanks which can be shaped as required. Some of the tool types are clearly recognisable, as saws, knives, choppers and chisels, for example. While effective when new, the edges of slate tools would have dulled quickly with use, and as the rock weathers rapidly it is often hard to recognise slate tools when possible examples are found at any distance away from sites where, because of known settlement, they are expected to occur. This rock was used for many years. Since the form of objects made changes little they are hard to date to any definite period. Although the best known examples come from Jarlshof, most sites with any suitable rock nearby show their own assemblage of rough but effective tools.

Tougher sandstones, which occur in many areas, were also used to make implements. Two forms of implement are particularly widespread, the mattock and the plough-tip (both names are based on the shape of objects, and have not been proved to be definite descriptions of function). Mattocks are elongate flattened tools, about thirty centimetres long, ten wide, and three to four thick. They taper towards the ends, and the tips frequently have smoothed areas on one or both sides consistent with use as a digging implement, presumably attached to some form of handle. Plough-tips are bars of roughly circular section tapering towards one end, and showing wear all round the point. This suggests they have been pushed or pulled through the soil, as the working end of a wooden stilt plough of the type occasionally found preserved in bogs. Both types of artefact indicate cultivation of the ground, with the plough used to break up the soil when preparing the field, and the mattock used for

everyday tilling. The large number of these objects littered around the cairns and walls associated with early houses suggests that they were a readily made and disposable commodity, and in fact the advent of iron did not banish the stone plough-tip, for examples were still in use into the last century. Sandstone served very well for rough tools which did not need to be very sharp, or to have a long life, but was not suitable for many purposes. In particular, it could not produce razor-sharp cutting edges, long-lasting scrapers for preparing hides or points for arrows. Nor could heavy woodworking tools be made from sandstone. In most parts of the country flint was used to produce finer types of artefact. Flint is a form of quartz resembling an impure glass, and can be flaked to produce a wide variety of shapes with sharp edges where required. Unfortunately for the Shetlanders, it has a very localised distribution, and does not occur in the islands except as small beach pebbles, which are often flawed and unsuitable for delicate shaping. For heavier tools, which were polished rather than flaked, Shetland was well provided with the requisite material in the form of tough, close-grained igneous rock.

To overcome this lack of flint, Shetlanders experimented with a variety of materials. The favourite, and that which was closest to flint, was quartz. This can produce sharp edges, but is much harder to work, for it is usually full of flaws which can cause it to crack in the wrong direction. Quartz tools are found, in the form of leaf-shaped arrowheads and small knives and scrapers, but these are generally not so elegant as their flint equivalents. A very few flint arrowheads are known, and these are probably of beach material. Since small fragments of quartz occur through the natural weathering of many of Shetland's rocks, quartz artefacts are less likely to be noticed than those of flint. Many years ago a magnificent axe of flint was found in Fair Isle (it is now in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh), but this was probably imported as a manufactured object, since there is no record of flint pebbles large enough on any island beaches. No other such objects are recorded.

One of the characteristic Neolithic tool-types is the polished stone axe. Such axes are made by flaking a rough shape from a block of close-grained stone, then rubbing this down to produce a smooth, and sometimes highly polished, finish. The best rocks are hard volcanic ashes ("tuffs") and fine-grained intrusive igneous rocks; the latter are present in quantity in North Mainland. Shetland has numerous examples of the two common polished tool types found in the rest of Britain, the axe and the mace-head, but it also has a unique type, found only in the islands, called the "Shetland knife" (See Figure 2).

All of these tools are easy to recognise, and are often noticed in fresh peat cuttings, where water on their smooth surfaces make them glisten in the sunlight. Axes vary between ten and thirty centimetres in length, and are shaped like elongated and flattened pears, with the broader end ground to an axe-like edge. While tests have shown that such axes, when mounted in wooden hafts, are quite capable of cutting down trees, there is good evidence that they were valuable in their own right, and may have been made as much for show as for use. Similarly, mace-heads, which again are of varied sizes, could have been tools or weapons, but are often very ornate and carefully finished. These mace-heads are readily distinguished, as they have hafting holes bored through them. In shape, the Shetland examples are generally tapered cylinders, with the ends smoothed off. It is thought that mace-heads are later than axes, but both were in use together by the end of the Neolithic. The third artefact type, the knife, is the most peculiar. Thin blocks of tough rock were flaked out and then ground from the two opposite sides to produce highly polished plates of oval shape and of thickness sometimes as little as four millimetres. These are in the order of fifteen to twenty centimetres long, and when made seem to have had a sharp edge all round the circumference. Before use, one of the long edges was ground smooth, to allow the knife to be held without cutting the hand. These artefacts are not known outside Shetland.

While it may be that all of these highly polished tools were made as status symbols for their owners, there can be no doubt that some of them were used, for we find axes with chipped edges, and sometimes resharpened. Knives are also found in a wear-damaged state, and are known to have been resharpened, both by chipping and grinding. Appropriately, the heavier knives tend to be roughly chipped into renewed sharpness, while the very slim, lightweight forms are reground. But the majority of polished tools found in Shetland do not show obvious signs of wear. That these tools were intrinsically valuable is suggested by their occasional discovery in caches buried in peat. The locations of hoards, and the fact that they are often arranged in patterns, would suggest that these are offerings of some sort, and not just groups hidden, lost or even buried in the peat as some part of the production process. Small groups of axes and larger groups of knives are occasionally found by peat-cutters in areas far even from prehistoric habitations, and this suggests some ritual connected with religion: for all we know, these may be offerings to the peat, which by the late Neolithic seems to have begun to spread and cover the upper farmland.

By a fortunate chance, many Shetland artefacts are made of a rare rock. This is a speckled or banded felsite, which occurs only in small outcrops on the northern slopes of North Mainland, beyond Ronas Hill. So objects made of Shetland rock, at least from these outcrops, can be recognised anywhere they occur. It is most interesting to note that axes and mace-heads of spherulitic felsite occur in other parts of Scotland, and even northern England, while knives are restricted to Shetland, suggesting they had a specialised use of appeal only to a limited group of people. More interesting still is that within Shetland, axes and mace-heads made of non-Shetland stone have been recognised, including one from Sullom Voe made of rock from one of the axe factories of the Lake District. Yet no knives have ever been found of rocks which could not be of local origin, the vast majority coming from the felsites of North Mainland. This surely means that there was trade, or exchange, which was either to obtain axes, or used axes as a means of currency, while knives were only valued in Shetland, so did not leave the islands as gifts or payment.

Some years ago, a shelter made of large granite blocks was found on the Beorgs of Uyea, west of North Roe. Inside this shelter, and all around it, were fragments of felsite, many of which had clearly been struck by man, and some of which looked like roughed-out axes and knives which had been abandoned part-way through, because of accidental breakage, or the discovery of poor quality inclusions. The shelter itself had been made by roofing the hollow left where prehistoric man had dug down beside a large mass of the best quality rock. Since then several simpler working places have been found in the same area. It seems that the rock was quarried and roughly shaped on site, and then taken away for final polishing.

It is unfortunate that few polished implements have been found in datable contexts. There are fragments of knives from sites as late as the brochs, but these may well have been found by chance then, as they are still found today. Some prehistoric houses have produced tools made by chipping rather than grinding this rock-type, and from the house at Stanydale came a much re-sharpened miniature axe. So they probably originate in the Neolithic. Only one excavation produced both knives and axes together, but this, at Modesty in West Mainland, took place before the days of radiocarbon dating, and we know little of the circumstances, except that pottery which may have been late Neolithic was found. It may well be that the actual production of knives and axes took place over a relatively short period at the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of

the Bronze Age, and that the stock of implements was then gradually reduced by breakage, loss and their use as votive offerings, until the technique of polishing went out of fashion. By the Iron Age, rock types once used to make polished implements were being used as substitutes for flint, and worked by chipping and flaking. The reason for suggesting a period of manufacture into the Bronze Age is that some Shetland axes closely resemble, in form, early flat bronze axes. It may be that this shape, an impractical one for stone-working, represents an attempt to copy a new technology in old materials.

Before considering metallurgy, mention must be made of the gaps in our knowledge. Some bone tools of early date are known, notably awls, needles and chisels. In addition, pegs and toggles were made from bone, while larger bones were used, with little preparation, as shovels and mattocks. Ribs were sharpened and used as knives for cutting up blubber and meat. However, these tools have survived only on a few sandy sites, for they have dissolved in the acid soils which cover most of Shetland. Early wooden tools doubtless existed in great number and variety, but these too have vanished, although a few objects survive from the Iron Age and onwards. One major source of materials may have been whales, for as well as providing food, a whale provides oil and bone. Eskimo tents of recent times had their roofs supported by whale ribs, and these may have been put to similar use in early Shetland. Whale vertebrae are large enough to form seats, or working platforms for stone-chipping. There can be no doubt that if whales, then more plentiful than now, were stranded on Shetland shores, the thrifty Neolithic inhabitants would have been able to make good use of their unexpected bounty. With all these skills in artefact manufacture available, it would not be surprising to learn that Shetland quickly adopted metallurgy when knowledge of bronze arrived in northern Scotland, around 1800 BC. In fact, the opposite is true, for there is very little evidence for early bronze-working in Shetland, nor are early types of bronze artefact known. It is not until the end of the Bronze Age, around 700 BC or later, that we find evidence for metal working at the long-established site of Jarlshof, and also at Wiltrow, a nearby house site. Nor were bronze objects imported in any quantity into Shetland from sources outside the islands, for the sole example of a bronze weapon remains one splendid spearhead found many years ago in Lunnasting.

All of this does not necessarily mean bronze was not imported, or worked, in Shetland at this period. However, since Shetland was by this time becoming more impoverished due to climatic deterioration, the



Plate 1

The "temple" at Stanydale, showing the concave facade, side alcoves and large central post-holes.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)



Plate 2

Bivallate fort at Hog Island Sound, showing earthen ramparts with central entrance causeway. The island (top) was linked to the mainland during the Iron Age.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)

wherewithal of trade may have been limited, and Shetland lies far from the nearest sources. There are copper veins in the islands, but there is no proof that these were known at this early date. It seems likely that bronze would have been a precious commodity, not to be wasted or lost, and that scrap fragments and outmoded or outworn tools would have been carefully gathered for reworking into more useful forms. This process of recycling would help to explain the observation that at the end of the Bronze Age the evidence for use of bronze increases markedly, to the extent that the early Iron Age of Shetland is marked by an increase in the amount of bronze found on sites.

From the later Bronze Age we know of two smiths' workshops, both producing ornaments and a few weapons. As well as scrap bronze and slag, fragments of moulds have been found at both sites, together with crucibles. The style of the objects being produced dates them firmly to the period just before the introduction of iron working, and although it had been suggested that these are the products of immigrant smiths who were reluctant to change their accustomed bronze of iron, and so moved north with their obsolescent trade, this seems rather unlikely. Once iron came into use, in these parts around 600 BC, bronze presumably dropped in value. This may have allowed Shetlanders to acquire more, or may simply have made them less careful with what bronze they had, so that more objects were lost, to be rediscovered in recent times.

The start of the Iron Age seems to be associated with changes in society, towards a more restless and troubled period, and this may in itself have been a cause of an increase in the need for weapons. Some artefacts, such as swords, may have been made in bronze for a considerable part of the Iron Age, until iron-working techniques developed to rival those of the bronze-smiths. In addition, the Iron Age saw changes in building styles, with larger and more elaborate constructions, using large quantities of wood, presumably requiring more heavy tools such as saws and adzes. The bone handles of such metal tools have been recovered from early Iron Age levels at Clickhimin.

Having now, in pursuit of early technology, come far ahead of our time, we must return to the late Neolithic to observe the way in which society was gradually changing.

A Period of Transition

While bronze itself is scarce, it can be shown that many of the changes associated with the first use of bronze elsewhere do occur in Shetland, which can thus be said to have a Bronze Age. New trends can be seen in

stone artefacts, in burial practices, in pottery and in location of settlement. Towards the end of the period a new class of site, the burnt mound, appears.

The key to this period is the climatic change which seems to have started in the later Bronze Age in southern Scotland, but was apparently earlier in the north. Around 1500 BC, or a little later, the climate changed to a wetter and cooler regime, a trend which continued for over a thousand years. In Shetland, already on the margins of cultivation, the result of this change was that peat began to accumulate on the higher ground, especially where the soil may have been exhausted by continual cropping. As time went on this blanket of peat spread downslope, burying the Neolithic farmland, and ultimately many of the habitations of the farmers. This was fortunate for archaeologists, but a disaster for the inhabitants of Shetland, who must have found themselves gradually forced down from the hill slopes to the areas around the voes, which would have been well-populated already. To add to this, the slow rise of the sea was reducing low-lying land around the shore, particularly in areas such as Virkie, where the gentle offshore slope meant that a slight rise in sea-level would destroy considerable tracts of flat land.

The farmers made the best they could of this situation, adapting their lifestyle to become more dependent upon their domesticated animals, and less upon crops. Probably the resources of the sea began to be exploited more fully at this time. But the effects of cumulative changes in climate must have been severe: not only was the arable area reduced, but lower temperatures and more rain would have made crops less reliable, and would have helped to waterlog the fields, a process made worse by the trampling of cattle. By the latter part of the Bronze Age, around 1000 BC and later, there can be little doubt that Shetland was supporting more people than it could comfortably accommodate. The results of this were felt in the following period, the Iron Age.

Having said that population densities on the coastal lands would have built up during the Bronze Age, it may seem strange that there is so little in the way of evidence for Bronze Age settlement, as distinct from Neolithic, and that so few typically "Bronze Age" artefacts should have been discovered. However, this anomaly is readily explained. Since Shetland was becoming gradually less hospitable, inducements to new settlers would have been slight, and the existing inhabitants may well have been openly hostile to newcomers. This, coupled with a shortage of wealth to acquire bronze, would be sufficient to account for the lack of clear outside contacts during the second millennium BC. A few new

practices were acquired from occasional contacts with the south, but by and large the way of life was conservative, particularly in aspects such as house building, where a type of structure suited to the Shetland environment, once developed, stayed in vogue for over three thousand years, from the early farms of the Neolithic right through into the Iron Age. The only major change is that circular houses seem gradually to have become more popular, and that house walls tend to become a little thinner. The end of this change can be seen in the houses at Jarlshof.

The only radical change in Shetland during the Bronze Age, which justifies the idea of a new period, was in funerary practices. As already described, Neolithic burials were inhumations, where the whole body was buried, rather than cremations. Burials were made in chambered cairns, in massive cists (with or without overlying cairns) and presumably into the earth alone, without elaborate preparations, and were generally multiple rather than single. In the Bronze Age, individual burial came to be prevalent in Shetland as elsewhere in Britain. With these new observances came new types of pottery, in particular the open-mouthed, vase-like vessels called "beakers", a term which recent research has shown to be very apposite, for some beakers have been found to have contained a drink akin to mead. The beakers are associated with the early Bronze Age, and they generally accompany burials of unburned bodies which lie with their knees drawn up to their chins. Few beaker burials are known from Shetland. Native potters seem to have adopted and adapted beakers to their own ends, and began to produce a range of coarser vessels with beaker-like incised decorations and less elegant forms. These are classed as "food vessels", for no very good reason, and together with larger vessels termed "urns", are found on domestic sites, occurring at many of the oval hous, and are also found as the containers for cremations, the type of burial which becomes the mode in the later Bronze Age. Such urns are rather more frequent in Shetland, and tend to occur in the coastal areas where we assume most people lived. The practice of burying large numbers of individuals in cairns ceases entirely shortly after the beaker pottery appears. Although a further change is noted as urns replace beakers, for the burial rite became one of cremation, with the ashes placed in or under the pottery vessel, it may be that all forms of collective religion did not cease, for urn burials are frequently found in groups, while the hall at Stanydale has pottery from this period and, indeed, later.

Accompanying these changes in burial practices, we find a change in one important artefact type, the arrowhead. While Neolithic arrows were

tipped with pointed oval heads, made of flint or quartz (and in Shetland also of felsite), Bronze Age arrowheads are of the more familiar form, a sharp triangle with two barbs on either side of a protruding tang, which was fastened into the shaft of the arrow. These barbed and tanged arrowheads are very rare in Shetland, probably because they are very hard to fabricate from quartz, since they require delicate flaking which only flint allows at all readily. In all likelihood, the oval, or "leaf-shaped" arrowhead of quartz carried on right through the Bronze Age.

A few other artefact types, known only from stray finds, have been singled out as of Bronze Age date, on evidence from elsewhere in Britain. Amongst these are the mace-heads described above, and some of the rather puzzling objects called "Shetland clubs" may also be of this date. These are club-shaped pieces of grey sandstone, chipped and pecked into shape, then ground smooth, sometimes into shapes with handles, looking rather like cricket bats. Many examples are decorated with simple patterns of incised lines, which sometimes bear vague resemblances to motifs on pottery of the earlier Bronze Age. Their purpose is completely unknown, and they are usually assumed to be some form of ceremonial object. (This is the archaeologists' explanation for many many things we do not understand.) There is also evidence that many Shetland knives carried on in use, and indeed may have been manufactured, during the Bronze Age. In fact, it can be seen that the introduction of bronze was not, as is sometimes casually believed, accompanied by a decrease in the quantity or standard of stoneworking. In fact certain artefacts, such as arrowheads, seem to have improved as if they were trying to compete with the new material. Thus the polished stone axes of the Neolithic were also produced in the Bronze Age, but in forms which emulated the newly available flat copper or bronze axes.

Shetland's Bronze Age, like that of the rest of northern Scotland, can best be regarded as a slow transition, during which a combination of climatic change and population increase, coupled with the introduction of new materials and techniques, brought the farmers of the Neolithic into a society which was rather more competitive, and in which an increasing tendency to gather into small groups was replacing the practice of living in separate farms. These trends intensified in the Iron Age. Before this is examined, a brief digression is necessary.

Stone Circles, Stone Rows and Standing Stones

Like most parts of upland Britain, Shetland abounds in standing stones, often single but sometimes laid out in patterns. We know from other

regions that such stones may have been erected at various dates, so it is perhaps better to look at them alone, rather than in the context of any particular period. Rough dates can be given to circles and rows of stone, but single blocks are almost impossible to place, especially as prehistoric stones were often used in later years as markers for navigation or to define boundaries.

The only "stone circle" listed for Shetland is rather unconvincing, an oval of irregularly spaced stones on the slopes of Wormadale Hill, between the new road and the old. It seems more likely to be the remains of an enclosure than a stone circle. A second possible circle is the puzzling monument called "Hjaltadans", on the moors of Fetlar. This is a ring of large blocks, which are not on end, with the centre of the circle marked by two large uprights. Once again, the date is unknown, but the "circle" bears some similarity to later Bronze Age burial cairns of the "kerbed" type, although it lacks any infilling material. To complete the trio of puzzles, there are the puzzling Rounds of Tivla, on Unst. These are three sets of circular banks, the best preserved of which has three concentric rings of earth, with a central stony spread. These may be a regional variant of the later Bronze Age burial tradition of "enclosed cremation cemeteries". There are also irregular shaped enclosures of large stones, the best of which is the Battle Pund, on Out Skerries.

While these sites can, in general, be fitted into a Bronze Age range of dates, the stone rows of northern Scotland are much harder to place. These are settings of small, upright, stones, arranged in parallel or slightly diverging lines. The best example so far known from Shetland was discovered recently in central Yell. Three rows of stubby uprights, running parallel and oriented north-east to south-west, lie on a flattish area beside the Loch of Lumbister. They are crossed by a shorter row of larger blocks, which is aligned north to south. This is not nearly so spectacular as some of the examples known from Caithness, such as Hill o' Many Stanes at Mid Clyth, but is equally inexplicable, at least until an example has been excavated. Shrewd guesses have placed these monuments in the earlier part of the Bronze Age, purely on the frequently observed association with other classes of monument.

Most of the upright stones in Shetland occur singly. They are very difficult to date, but there can be little doubt that some may go back to the late Neolithic. Stone uprights have been used for many purposes over the years, especially in an area with no large trees, and there is no reason why a Neolithic standing stone should not be a boundary mark, or a Bronze Age monolith a navigation point. Whatever the motives behind

their erection, all standing stones furnish useful landmarks in a landscape of generally undistinguished relief. (See Figure 3).

Many of the heel-shaped cairns had an orthostat set at each end of the facade, and when cairns have been robbed for building material, it is often only these slabs, which were too large to carry, which are left. A good example of this can be seen at Housetter, beside the road to North Roe. Sometimes pairs of stones are quite clearly set so as to provide markers for entering difficult harbours; the pair at Clivocast, near Uyeasound, would fall into this class. Even single stones often seem to be set so as to act as sailing marks, for example the stones at Busta, or at Feal in Fetlar. Still more of the standing stones of Shetland are quite clearly markers used in defining boundaries, and this practice of setting up stones to mark corners of landholdings was continued into the Medieval period, although its origins lie far earlier, as shown by the discovery, many years ago, of a set of stone knives buried near the foot of a standing stone at Skeld. Surprisingly, considering the grim legends often associated with standing stones and stone circles, no one has ever found a burial associated with a Shetland stone.

So single stones must remain enigmatic, for they are known to have been erected at every period and for every purpose. Settings of multiple stones, however, seem most likely to be of Bronze Age date.

Unsettled Times: The Iron Age

Towards the end of the Bronze Age, a new class of monument appeared. This was the "burnt mound". Most examples are kidney-shape in plan and are, as their name implies, large mounds of burnt stones (See Figure 3). The stones are generally quite small in size. On excavation, these mounds have been shown to possess troughs made of flat slabs of stone, and traces of hearths are frequently found, with fragments of coarse pottery and sometimes bone. More rarely, small houses of wood or stone have been found close beside, and partly buried in, burnt mounds. There is little doubt that these monuments represent the cooking places of people who did not possess pottery vessels large enough to boil large joints of beef and had devised an ingenious escape from the monotony of roasted food. The trough would be filled with water (all mounds lie close to sources), a fire kindled on the hearth and stones placed in it to heat. A joint of meat was then placed in the trough, and the water in this brought to boiling point by adding hot stones, perhaps with the aid of a bone shovel. The temperature could be maintained by adding stones from time to time, until the meat was cooked. Experiments have shown

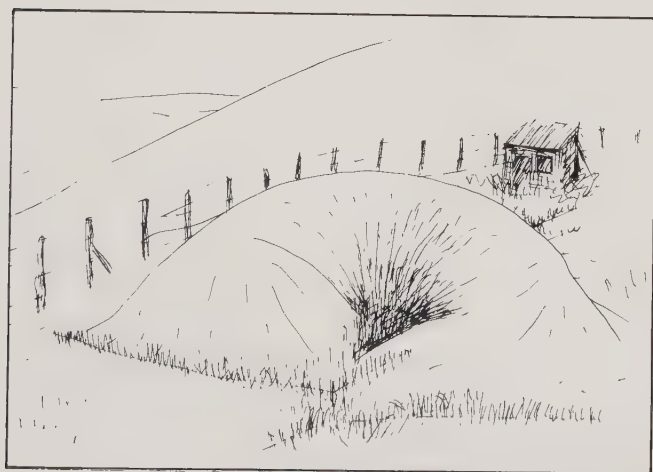


Figure 3
Standing stone at Troswick, Burnt mound at Crawton

that this procedure is effective. The presence of sherds of coarse pottery suggests that other foods were prepared to accompany the main item on defence. Since the number of people was gradually increasing while the capacity of the land to carry these numbers were decreasing, it was haggis, which would be ideally suited to this culinary method.

In a few cases whole houses, of the usual oval plan, have been found buried in these mounds, and this might imply that this was a normal method of cooking, and not something indulged in only for occasional feasts. Burnt stones, in quantity, have been recorded from a number of broch sites also. It may be that this seemingly simple change to the preparation of large quantities of food at one time marks a much deeper trend in late Bronze Age Shetland.

The middle part of the first millennium BC saw a major change in Shetland. From unenclosed single farms of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age there gradually evolved more nucleated settlements, with houses clustered together, often near to the shore, as at Jarlshof. As described above, there were good environmental reasons for this, but at some time in the later Bronze Age a new factor emerged, that of self-defence. Since the number of people were gradually increasing while the capacity of the land to carry these numbers were decreasing, it was inevitable that in Shetland, as elsewhere in northern and western Europe, the time would come when minor wrangles over territory would develop into longer lasting feuds, and feuds into localised warfare. To find protection from hostile neighbours, bands of families would join together, and slowly leaders would emerge to direct operations in times of trouble. This emergence of communities with close ties and identifiable leaders, while helping to protect the individual, led ultimately to more instability, for the new organisation of society allowed raids and land-takings which were impossible under the older system of isolated self-sufficiency.

It would be naive to imagine that this happened in Shetland without any outside influences, and the first signs of defensive structures are close in time to the arrival of new styles of pottery, new forms of bronze ornaments and, most important, a new metal, iron. There is much debate as to how these introductions are related to the wider changes in society. It has been argued that all the new traits, plus the idea of building fortifications, arrived with settlers from the south, presumably Orkney. But the evidence is not conclusive. At Clickhimin, a fort was built before the first traces of iron-working appear; at Jarlshof, the reverse appears

true, while at Wiltrow, iron was worked in a house which is in outward appearance a standard example of Neolithic-Bronze Age type.

It is perhaps safest to state that iron arrived at approximately the same period as a major reorganisation of society over the whole of northern Scotland, including Shetland. This took the form of the clustering of families into larger units, which in turn brought forth a stratification in society, with certain individuals or families emerging as leaders of their communities. This reorganisation made possible a more territorial approach to inter-community relationships, and the directing presence of leaders in larger groups allowed major projects of defensive construction to be undertaken. The results of these have come down to us in the form of the ruins of many forts and brochs.

It is unwise to assume that some sort of organising hierarchy was new: after all, the chambered cairns, or Stanydale hall, must have been considerable feats of central direction. The major change in the early Iron Age (around 500 BC), is that the direction is towards defence, and that a large number of sizeable projects seem to have been undertaken in a relatively short space of time. The nucleation of society helped to reinforce the trends of slow response to the changes in the climate, so that the distribution of population in Shetland changed from a scatter all around the coasts to a series of coastal units, each centred on a single site, where a defensive structure had been erected.

Until recently, it was thought that the only common type of fortified dwelling in the north of Scotland was the broch, a tall circular fort with a thick, hollow wall and a single small entrance. Recent work has shown that, while brochs are still most important numerically, other types of fort are not nearly so rare as had been assumed. So far there is no firm evidence for the relative dating of brochs and other types of defence, although the fort at Clickhimin clearly predated the broch there by many years. The form of some forts seems to be pre-broch in conception, while others may be broadly contemporary with the brochs.

Shetland's forts are all relatively small in area, and occur in two kinds of location: on cliffed promontories and on small islands in lochs or sheltered voes. Both types of site made possible the enclosure of an adequate area with a minimum of work. A whole promontory could be cut off with a short wall across the neck, while on islets approached by narrow causeways it is usually observed that the walling is heavy only on the side of the islet nearest to the causeway, and much slighter elsewhere around the circuit. This may be seen at Loch of Huxter, Whalsay.

Defences were constructed in quite a variety of ways, including

simple stone walls, stone-faced earthen ramparts and ramparts of earth alone. All types of defence (with ditches on some, but not all, sites) tend not to be very substantial. Even the earthen ramparts seldom exceed ten metres in breadth, and may have been no more than three metres high. However, this would have been quite adequate to turn the natural awkwardness of a well-chosen site into a reliable defence. Most forts are simple in concept. Promontory ramparts run across the narrowest part of a neck of land, usually leaving a narrow gap at one side or the other, which we must assume was closed by a gate of wood. Good examples of these simple forts are widespread, and particularly fine specimens can be seen at Aywick (Yell) and Garth Ness (Sandness). At the last-named and at Hog Island Sound, in North Nesting (Plate 2), the rising sea-level has made islands of what were probably promontories when the forts were built.

Ramparts are generally simple elongate mounds of earth and stones, sometimes with an external facing of masonry. However, some sites were enclosed with stout stone walls, and it is likely that many of the apparently earthen ramparts are formed by the collapse of stone walls. This was seen at Scatness, where a stone blockhouse was found to have broken down so that it formed a sloping bank. Forts on islets generally have a stone wall, from one to three metres thick, running around the edge, with a single narrow entrance. Good examples can be seen from the road at Loch of Brindister and Burga Water, and further afield at Loch of Kettlester, in Yell and Loch of Huxter, in Whalsay.

At Loch of Huxter, the wall was built onto the ends of an elaborate gateway, which ran across the side of the islet nearest the shore and the approach causeway. This consisted of a rectangular block of masonry with an entrance passage running through it, and contained two basal cells. Above this level was a hollow gallery, running within the wall thickness, which would have given any defender a height advantage over an attack from outside. The entrance, cells and hollow wall are features also found in the brochs, and they are repeated in similar "blockhouses" at Ness of Burgi, Scatness and Clickhimin, while ruined examples occur at Burgi Geos (Yell) and, probably, at Burraland broch.

These elaborate forts show broch-like features, but it has so far proved impossible to say whether they are ancestral to the brochs or simply adaptations to peculiar situations. The evidence from Clickhimin suggests an early date for the blockhouse there, and this evidence, together with the West Burrafirth broch, which looks like an experiment in hollow wall construction, lead one to think that here may be one of the

various building traditions which were amalgamated to produce that most studied of fortifications, the broch.

Before discussing brochs, it should be noted that about half of the seventy-five known in Shetland have ramparts or walls outside the broch tower itself, and some of these are in fact substantial enough to have served as defences in their own right. But for the presence of the broch, the outer defences at sites such as Burland (Plate 3), Aithsetter and Burraland would fall into the class of promontory forts, and would be by no means the slightest of these. Away from the coast, a number of brochs are surrounded by walls reminiscent of the early fort at Clickhimin: Culswick and Levenwick are fine examples. Substantial series of earthen ramparts and ditches surround brochs such as Underhoull on Unst, Belmont, on the same island, and Dalsetter, in South Mainland. So on at least some sites, the broch may not be the first defence to be erected, and this suggests that there may be a much longer history of conflict in Iron Age Shetland than has hitherto been realised.

Although the brochs are the best known of Shetland's prehistoric remains, surprisingly little can be said about them with certainty, for there have been very few modern excavations, and old digging did not produce very much information, since it concentrated upon the search for objects and ignored details of construction and the organic remains which can now help to reconstruct the economy of times past. Recent work on Orkney has revealed that broch-like structures were being built there as early as 600 BC. Some of the Shetland brochs show considerable similarity, and this tends to support the idea that the majority were built over a short space of time, perhaps two centuries at most. The most likely picture is a slow process of development, with few brochs being built, as problems are ironed out, followed by a rapid spread of the structural type once a workable design had evolved.

Shetland possesses, on the island of Mousa (Plate 4), the best preserved of the brochs. A circular foundation, four and a half metres thick, surrounds an inner courtyard six metres in diameter. This massive foundation is pierced by an entrance passage a little over one metre wide, with a recess partway along it to take the frame of a now-vanished wooden door. Within the solid wallbase are three oval cells with corbelled roofs. These are reached from the inner court through narrow passages. Three metres from ground level the character of the broch wall changes, and from this height upwards it is hollow, with six level galleries, each one floored by the lintels which roof the gallery below. A steep stairway spirals upwards within this hollow wall, cutting through

the galleries, to emerge at the wallhead thirteen metres above the ground and probably close to the original full height of the broch. Within the court may have stood wooden tenements, supported on central posts and on the ledges of stone which protrude from the inner face of the broch. These, and their roof, have long vanished, having been replaced by stone fittings on the floor of the broch. The wooden platforms would have allowed a sizeable number of people to shelter inside the tower but might equally well have been used for more everyday functions such as storing hay.

While Mousa looks almost too good to be true, there seems to be no truth behind the often-heard story that it is a nineteenth century reconstruction, although it was repaired about 1851. It was well enough preserved in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries to serve as a shelter for Norse fugitives. However, Mousa is not quite representative of the majority of Shetland's more ruined brochs. Having a smaller diameter and a more massive wall than most, Mousa probably stands higher than almost any other broch ever did, but there is little doubt that many brochs were tall enough to be described as towers. Mousa also lacks the ingenious guard cells found in most other brochs. These are small cells with their narrow entrances opening into the main entrance passage just behind the door recess, in such a fashion that a single man stationed in the guard cell could obstruct the passage of many, as they would be forced to enter in single file. Another pitfall awaiting the unwary visitor was an arrangement whereby spaces were left between the lintels which roof the passage, so that a man in the gallery above could see, and spear, any unwelcome guest. This can be seen to advantage at Clickhimin.

Of the seventy-five likely brochs in Shetland, enough are sufficiently preserved to enable us to say that Mousa is a very solid, and possibly late, example. It seems almost to be an expression of the capabilities of the builders, for its height is wholly excessive to any defensive requirements, especially as the absence of guard cells or strong outer ramparts argue against the idea that it was intended as a very strongly defensible structure.

Most brochs in Shetland had a number of lesser buildings clustered around them. It may be that at some brochs these buildings were in use at the same time as the brochs, and served to house members of a group which had grown too large for everyone to live permanently within the tower. At other sites, it can be clearly seen that the external remains are those of houses which post-date both broch and outer defences, as at Snabrough, in Unst and Loch of Houlland, in Eshaness. At Clickhimin



Plate 3

Ruined broch at Burland, showing entrance passage ending on cliff edge, and rubble in interior. Three ramparts run across the promontory to landward of the broch, and a large flat stone in the outer one may mark the edge of an entrance causeway.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)



Plate 4

Broch of Mousa, the most complete example surviving. Note the easily quarried flagstones of the shoreline.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)

and Jarlshof some of the external dwellings have been shown to be earlier than the brochs, and a similar situation probably occurs at Levenwick. Little systematic study has been devoted to such remains in Shetland, but it appears that large numbers of subsidiary houses do seem to occur where the local land is of above average quality.

What were the brochs? They appear to have developed as strongly built farmhouses, with internal arrangements designed to be capable of temporarily accommodating large numbers of people. Their ancestors can be found in the early forts and roundhouses of Orkney and Shetland, the “wags” of Caithness and the galleried duns and promontory forts of the Hebrides. These all contributed elements to the eventual broch design, which can thus be seen as a product of the mingling of the skills of the whole of northern Scotland’s Atlantic seaboard. The brochs were passively defensive, with only the wallhead available as a fighting platform, from which weapons and stones could be hurled, but only at the risk of silhouetting oneself against the sky and making an easy target for an attacker with ready spear. It seems that the builders of brochs feared for their own lives rather than for their property, for the internal space of brochs is inadequate to accommodate the chief resource of these farmers, their cattle. Also, the attackers cannot have been much stronger in military terms than the defenders, for the expedient of simply running inside and shutting the door seems to have been deemed sufficient defence. The Romans, had they reached these parts, would have made short work of a broch. The type of society behind broch building was most likely one where feuding and raiding played a major part, with the unhappy losers being sold into slavery elsewhere.

It is quite possible that most brochs were never put to the test. The broch may well have been a fad, a way of demonstrating the prestige of a group, or of a group’s leaders. Since it took time to build and time was of value then as now, there may have been great esteem to be gained from showing how much spare time the group had: an early form of communal status symbol. There seems to be no other way of explaining Mousa’s excessive height, or the elaboration of outer ramparts at Belmont.

Compared with the architecture of brochs, the daily life of their inhabitants has received scant attention. From a study of the places in which brochs are found, we can see that they represent the homes of groups of farmers who practised a mixed economy, but with an emphasis on cereal growing which seems more in tune with the earlier Neolithic than the preceding Bronze Age. This was to some extent made possible

by a stabilisation in the climate after the long period of worsening conditions experienced through the Bronze Age, but was largely the inevitable consequence of the formation of larger groups of inhabitants. The Iron Age sees the start of the pattern of land use familiar to the present day, with a small settlement nucleus surrounded by well-manured arable land with good grazing behind merging into moorland. And doubtless the farmers then, as later, took advantage of the bounty of the sea, especially when harvests were poor. Because the Iron Age farmer used the same land, in much the same way, as later Shetlanders, it is hard to find evidence of their fields, but a few traces can be seen around Greenbank on Yell and also at the nearby Burra Ness. Clearance cairns of probable Iron Age date can be seen at Burra Ness, at Belmont on Unst and near Burgi Geos, on the desolate west coast of northern Yell. These traces only survive where the land has proved too poor for subsequent farmers to have settled long.

Some time around the latter half of the second century AD the brochs seem to have gone out of fashion, either because the threat of violent attack had ceased, or because they simply became outmoded. Events to the south, in mainland Scotland, have been evoked as the reason for this, but the connection is far from clear. Some of Shetland's brochs were partially demolished, and some were modified by the insertion of stone fittings in place of wooden ones, to convert the broch from a refuge for many people to a single family dwelling. Good examples of these inserted walls can be seen at Mousa, Jarlshof and Clickhimin, and unexcavated examples at Burland.

Most of the internal additions, and the free-standing houses of the immediate post-broch phase at Jarlshof, are circular in plan, with a central area, containing a hearth, surrounded by a series of alcoves formed by masonry piers which project inwards from the wall of the house. The roofs of these structures were corbelled, at least around the outer part, and they probably had a central smoke-hole which could be covered in inclement weather. This is a house-plan not known before from Shetland, and has been termed a "wheelhouse", on the basis of its resemblance, as seen from above, to the hub, spokes and rim of a wheel. It has been suggested that these structures may be stone equivalents of wooden roundhouses such as are found further south in Scotland.

The pottery associated with the wheelhouse period at Jarlshof and Clickhimin looks very like pottery of a similar period from Orkney, where wheelhouses have not yet been identified, although earlier round stone houses are known. The wheelhouse occurs in the Hebrides, but

there the pottery of this period is readily distinguished from that found in Shetland. While this paradox cannot be resolved with our present knowledge, it can generally be remarked that the period at the end of the use of the brochs in Shetland is one of widening contacts with other parts of Scotland, and perhaps with areas further afield. From the wheelhouse levels at the two sites come fragments of glass and pottery of Roman type, which are likely to be loot or souvenirs rather than trade goods, although we know that the Romans reached these waters in their galleys as part of their search for northern frontiers. Other objects of bronze and glass indicate contact with native groups in southern Scotland, but whether these widened horizons were a result of fresh immigration or merely of a relaxing of the inward-looking defensive attitudes of the preceding generations, we cannot say. Once more, the facts of archaeology are not sufficient to explain the reality of prehistory.

The majority of post-bröch houses in Shetland are much less elaborate than the wheelhouses, being lightly-built variants of the traditional Shetland oval house. Indeed, the excavations at house sites near Underhoull broch in Unst suggest that some of these houses may have been in use throughout the broch period, and if this is the case, it would help to explain the rather uneven distribution of brochs.

While most artefacts of this period are uninspiring, with a continuation of older forms supplemented by a few bronze items, the pottery is rather interesting. In the early Iron Age, pottery is rather plain, having lost the decoration of the Neolithic and Bronze Age types, and vessels are bucket-shaped and decidedly utilitarian. About the date of the early forts and brochs, this plain, steatite-gritted ware becomes more elaborate, with the production of vase-like vessels with out-turned rims. At the height of the broch period incised decoration reappears, and pots begin to bear applied bands of clay, twisted or finger-pinched. In addition, non-steatitic wares become more popular, with a red-brown appearance when fired, in contrast to the older greys and drab browns, and a new variety of steatite ware appears, a fine fabric with a glossy black exterior made by burnishing the surface of the vessel. Towards the end of the broch-using phase a very distinctive vessel appears, a globular jar with out-turned rim and a finger-impressed cordon, or clay band, around the neck. This is closely associated with the wheelhouses. But after the passage of little more than two centuries, Shetland pottery had returned to its pre-Iron Age state, with only the occasional out-turned rim as a reminder of its former variety.

Just what this diversification and subsequent simplification means is

difficult to determine. One of the many answers could be the gradual immigration of small groups of settlers, each bringing fresh ideas which are integrated into the local pottery traditions. A more ambitious scheme calls for the emergence of a divided population, with different classes of ware for different levels of society. The mundane archaeologist finds a simpler answer, that we know of this variety of pottery because a far greater number of sites have been dug from Iron Age times than those of any other period. As a result we have more Iron Age pottery to study, and in all probability what we are seeing is a complete range of pots for a complete range of purposes: slick, shiny black ware for best, red-brown ware for table use and the coarser varieties for cooking and storage. Decoration would vary with taste and fashion, but this does not necessarily mean that Shetland fashion alone, for it is hard to believe that the emergence of a glossy, black, pottery type in Shetland, not long after a similar ware appears in regions under Roman influence, is a complete coincidence.

At any rate, after what was, by archaeological standards, a hectic period of social upheaval accompanied by unprecedented changes in building practices, Shetland by about 400 AD seems to have settled back into a normal pattern of life, with the turbulent Iron Age largely forgotten. The clusters of people around the broch sites gradually thin, as families move out into the countryside, now safe from imminent attack, and life slips back into the daily round of ploughing, herding and fishing. With this return to “normality” comes a lack of information from archaeology, and we move, by default rather than for a positive reason, into the Dark Ages.

Priests and Picts

Very little is known about the end of the Iron Age in Shetland, and in many respects the way of life seems to have changed little from the later Iron Age until Medieval times. However, it has become traditional to start a new archaeological period with the coming of Christianity to the north. In Shetland there is some support for this new period in the appearance of a new type of habitation site and in the adoption of new artistic styles, the latter of the class generally called “Pictish”. There can be little doubt that Christianity was brought to the islands by small groups of priest-monks around the end of the sixth century AD, and that these incomers found a population of older inhabitants in the islands, who for the sake of argument can be called Picts. It is also quite certain

that in Shetland, as in Orkney, Faroe and Iceland, pagan Norse settlers found colonies of clerics well established.

The native population, composed of the results of various influxes from Neolithic to late Iron Age times, seem to have been living a peaceful agricultural life during the fifth and sixth centuries, and the production of distinctive (some say all) pottery had ceased. Because of this, it is hard to locate their settlement sites, and it is quite likely that these may have disappeared below the homes of later Norse immigrants. There are a few Norse placenames which contain the element "petta", thought to signify Pictish links. These names, such as Pettaster, Pettadale or Pettifirth, are all in fairly remote and unattractive places, suggesting that, as the Norse settlers moved in, the last communities to become dominated by Norse culture may have been those living in the inland valleys.

It was formerly believed that a whole class of monument, the earth-houses or souterrains, could be attributed to the Picts. There are a few of these underground storeplaces in Shetland, all of them quite small by Scottish standards, and mostly ruined. However, as recent excavations in mainland Scotland have shown that these structures were constructed as early as the beginning of the Iron Age, they must be ruled out as an indicator of the presence of the people we call the Picts, who only come into focus with the references to them in fourth and fifth century Roman writers. Shetland produced, in excavations at Sandwick (Unst) one of the very few Pictish period burials known in Scotland. A single skeleton was found below a low square cairn made of quartz pebbles and edged with upright stone slabs. But apart from this site, other burials have proved as elusive as settlements. This leaves us only the remarkable sculptured stones and a series of metal objects worked in a similar artistic style, together with the evidence of placenames and rare literary documents, to support the idea of a people called the Picts.

"Pict" seems to have originated as a term for a confederation of northern tribes who fought against the Romans in mainland Scotland. It is probably a genuine name, rather than a Roman invention (the Latin derivation would be from "pictus", painted), for the word was adopted or already used by Scots in Ireland, Angles in Northumbria and the Norse when they arrived in Scotland. No written records of the Pictish language are known, apart from a number of largely undecipherable oghmic inscriptions on sculptured stones. It may well be that the Picts, if they had written language, only employed it on rare occasions, and kept records by memory or by the use of trained individuals who would pass on traditions from generation to generation. This feature was found in

the Irish peoples of this period, where written language is intimately associated with the arrival of Christianity.

Shetland possesses a small number of Pictish symbol stones. These are slabs of rock carved with various combinations of a standard set of subjects. Early examples bear abstract or animal motifs, and are usually incised upon rough boulders, while later examples often include human figures and Christian allusions, and are carved upon prepared flat slabs. There is much debate as to the function of the carved stones, which have been seen variously as grave-markers, memorials, boundary markers or gathering points. However, there is no doubt that they were produced locally, as they are of local rock types, and thus represent at least one person working in the art style termed "Pictish". There are very few examples of the early, non-Christian motif, stones in Shetland, and the only surviving example is the tiny Islesburgh eagle. Even this could be seen as having a religious link, for the eagle appears in later manuscripts as the symbol of St John the Evangelist. The rest of Shetland's carved stones are of explicitly Christian type, including crosses or clerical figures in their design. A series of these stones has been recovered from the site of St Laurence's Church, Papil (West Burra), while more have come from St Mary's, Cullingsburgh, on Bressay and from St Ninian's Isle, off the west side of South Mainland. Some are of very high artistic quality, and most have found their way to the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh (Plate 5). Amongst the stones from Papil and St Ninian's are fragments of stone altars or shrines, built from slabs held together at the corners by grooved posts of stone. One of the slabs from Papil has a view of a group of monks, in procession, with one mounted on a pony and the rest on foot. One of the walking monks carries a book satchel. Clearly, the priests of the Early Christian period in Shetland were not averse to the use of Pictish idioms in religious contexts. This, and the absence of any overtly Irish remains, leads to the interesting speculation that Shetland may have been converted by Pictish, rather than Scottish, clerics. Nevertheless, there is also evidence for a monastic tradition in the church in Shetland, and this may be of Scottish origin, although it was later adopted by converted Norsemen.

The sites from which Pictish stones of Christian motif have been recovered are all quite clearly the type of site where a church serving a local community might be located. That these communities were "Pictish" can hardly be doubted, and the treasure from St Ninian's Isle suggests that they may have been relatively wealthy, or at least may have included wealthy individuals. The treasure, found during excavations on



Plate 5

The Papil Stone, a Pictish cross-slab from West Burra, showing monks (one carrying a book satchel), a lion (symbol of St John) and two armed bird-headed figures of unknown symbolism. (In Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh).

(Photo: Crown Copyright)

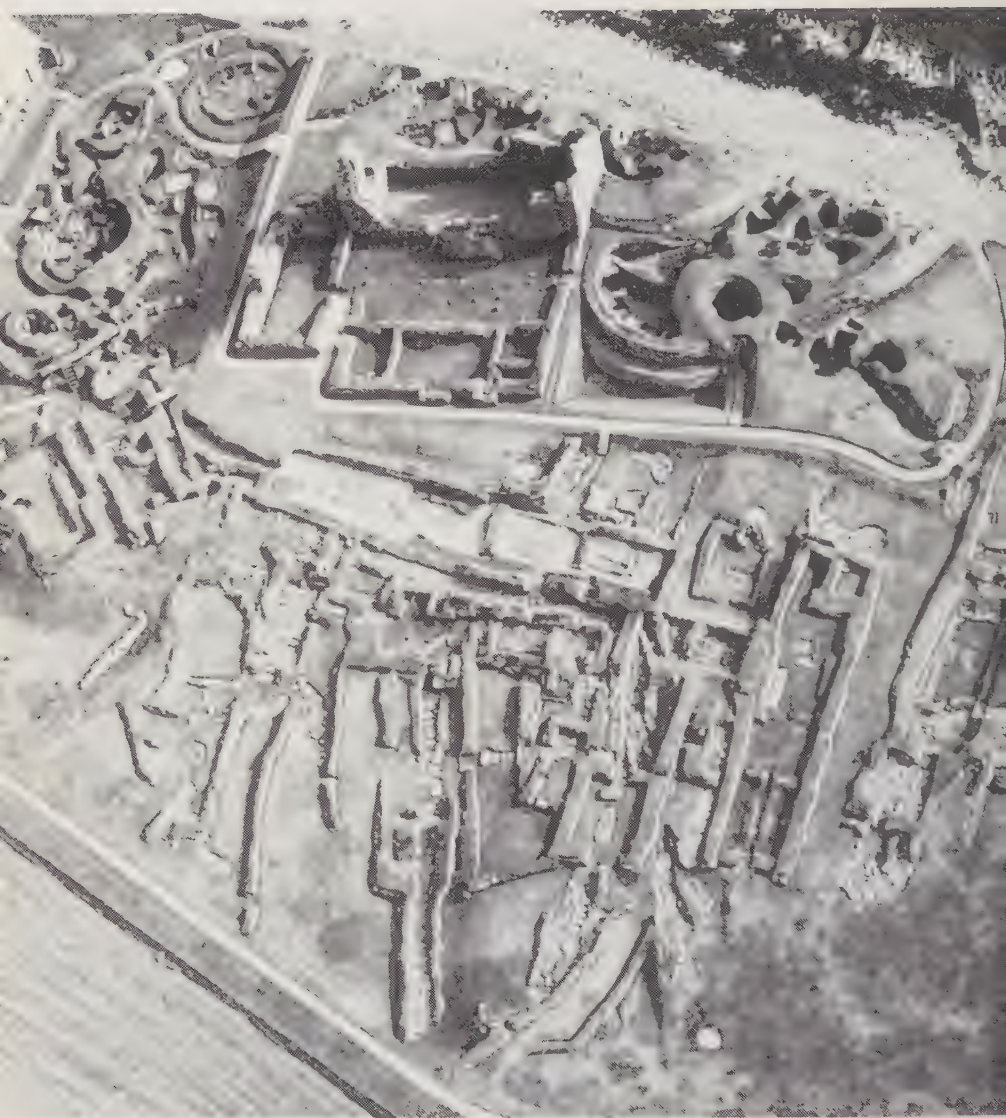


Plate 6

Jarlshof: one of the most complex and long-lived settlements in Scotland. From top left, clockwise: Bronze Age houses, Iron Age houses, Medieval laird's house and graveyard, broch (halved by sea), Iron Age wheelhouses, many phases of Norse house, and, centre left, Medieval farm.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)

the site of the early chapel, consists of a collection of brooches, bowls and other items, all of silver and all skillfully worked with surface designs in the later Pictish mode. It is even possible that they were made in Shetland, and failing this, highly probable that they were made in northern Scotland. The treasure is now in the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, with copies in Lerwick.

The small size of early churches might suggest a vertically divided population, with only the top stratum being converted to Christianity in the early days. If the Pictish element in the population was small but dominant, this would account for the obvious wealth of the early church and the Pictish art style, while allowing the churches to be small and widely scattered. Many of the early churches were surrounded by a circular earthen bank, the remains of which can still be seen at Papil, Cullingsburgh, St Ninian's Isle and Kirkaby (Unst). This bank probably marked the area of sacred ground. (See Plate 8).

In total contrast to these churches, which were placed to serve a resident community, are the second series of sites of Christian association. These are a number of clusters of small dwellings built on the remotest and most inhospitable points of the coast. None are easy of access, and some are positively dangerous. There remains little doubt that these represent the dwellings of manastic communities on the lines of those found throughout northern Britain at this period, built far from other human settlement, in places which were calculated to provide a bare and austere existence, thus purifying the soul for its eventual passage heavenwards. Because these sites are so remote, they have been little studied, but recent work has made it clear that Shetland supported communities of this type for a considerable period of time, probably from pre-Norse days through the Viking period. This can be suggested from the different shapes of foundation surviving. A number of sites have clusters of small, oblong foundations, arranged in rows. These resemble the small oval houses sometimes found on broch sites, and probably date to very late post-broch times. It is suspected that these buildings on promontories, in orderly array, mark the earliest of the eremitic communities. A further group of sites, those on slightly better locations from an agricultural point of view, have rows of longhouse foundations, with slightly bowed walls. These cannot be other than Norse in origin, and can be equated with such Orcadian sites as Brough of Birsay and Deerness. The Norse church, once established, seems to have adopted local practices in northern Britain.

In some of the more remote establishments, such as those at Kame

of Isbister or Birrier of West Sandwick, on opposite sides of Yell Sound, life must have been very bare indeed, with little beyond seafoal and fish, perhaps supplemented by a few garden plots and some sheep on the hill behind. At the sites which appear to be Norse, the potential of the land is greater, as can be seen at sites like Bluemull (Unst), Strandibrough (Fetlar) and Kirkholm near Sand. Here the buildings may have served partly as a farm, with a monastic tradition more in keeping with recent times, emphasising self-sufficiency rather than self-denial. The Norse appear to have taken some sites from of earlier clerics, as attested by the fact that the centre of early Norse power was Papa Stour, a name which means "big island of the priests". A number of other "papa" place-names suggest to Norse discovery of clerical communities in residence.

There are doubtless eremitical sites yet to be discovered, on seaward-sloping promontories or offshore stacks. Such sites be recognised by the orderly layout of the foundations, and the earlier sites are typified by very small dwellings, little larger than three metres by two metres internally at some sites. In a few cases, earlier fortifications seem to have been re-used, for example at Garth Ness. The houses on sites attributed to Norse clerics are larger, and of characteristic rectilinear plan. The key to identifying these sites is the absurdity of their location in practical terms. Not content with the permanent exposure of communal sites such as Strandibrough, the monks also built small cells in even more remote places, to allow members of the community to escape into total isolation. The ruins of such hermitages may be seen on the Clett, a precipitous stack north of Fetlar, and on such forbidding rocks as Freya Stack, off Foula.

Both traditions seem to have survived the Norse immigration, with church sites carrying on to form the locations of Medieval chapels, while the monastic practices of earlier times were eventually translated into a Norse equivalent. To return to Pictish times, we have seen that there is a wealth of evidence for the early church, and a series of tantalising glimpses of the Pictish traditions of at least part of the populace. But of the domestic structures of this period, not a trace has been recovered and firmly dated, except at Jarlshof, where the houses assigned to the late Pictish period were flimsily built and poorly preserved.

It may be that Picts chose locations which were the same as those favoured by the incoming Norsemen in later years, so that Pictish settlement disappeared below Norse farms, while these in turn were obscured by generations of later crofts. Alternatively, houses may have been built of perishable materials, such as turf and wood, which have

since decayed to leave no visible remains. Apart from the uncertain examples at Jarlshof, no-one has yet proved the existence of a Pictish house in Shetland. The problem for the archaeologist is that the Picts, if we may so call them, do not appear to have had any distinctive everyday artefacts. Thus even if house-sites of the correct date were found, these might not be recognised for what they were. Only church sites have produced specifically Pictish material, and here we cannot be sure whether the priests, or a part of their flock, or the whole of the community, belonged to the greater Pictish people. The Picts are a fine example of the way in which prehistorians can take a few attributes and use them to construct a “culture”, which may have had no real basis in society. The only certain things about the Shetland Picts are that the Norse found people in Shetland they called “Picts”, and that there are a few objects in the art-style we call “Pictish”. We cannot even prove that the two went together!

We have come, in terms of information, almost full circle, from the very earliest settlers, whose homes we have not discovered, to the Picts, about whom we know even less. But at every period we have seen how the distinctive character of Shetland has called forth responses from its inhabitants, forcing them to modify their lifestyles in tune with wind and weather, and to adapt to use all the resources available to them.

It therefore comes as something of a surprise to discover Shetland suddenly becoming, at the end of the eighth century AD, a “promised land” for large numbers of settlers.

Out of Prehistory: The Norse Settlement

We know considerably more about the first Norse settlers than we do about their predecessors in Shetland. They came from western and southern Norway, probably early in the ninth century AD. Although the reason for earlier Viking raids all round the coasts of Britain was to plunder, it seems the raiders kept their eyes open for likely territory to settle, and by Norse standards Shetland was an attractive and somewhat familiar landscape. Around 800 AD there would appear to have been a fairly drastic economic situation in Norway: possibly a collapse of the farming system due to successive bad harvests. In any case, ever increasing numbers of Norsemen chose to cross to Shetland, bringing their families, goods and gear with them. Compared with overcrowded Norway, Shetland seems to have been relatively empty at this time. Just when the first settlement happened, and where, is a question unlikely to be answered. Unst or Fetlar might be a candidate. Local tradition maintains that a distinct race, neither Picts nor Norsemen, inhabited north-east Unst and eastern Fetlar. They were called Finns. These could perhaps be the first Scandinavians in Shetland, for "Finn" could derive from the word for white, or fair — "fionn" in Scots gaelic or "wen" in the older British form of the Celtic tongue — "f" for "w" is a well known north-east Scottish pronunciation.

We know from the way in which the names of places are constructed (and over 99 per cent of Shetland names have Norse derivations), and the personal names within these place names, that the bulk of the more important settlers came from the area around, and south of, present day Trondheim, which was later for centuries to be the seat of the bishopric covering Shetland. From the elements of some place-names we can attempt to analyse the settlement process. It seems names ending in "by" or "sta/ster" (Melby, Norby, Boust, Elvister) were early farms, with "bister" farms following (such as Symbister, Wadbister), then "setter" farms last of all (Dalsetter, for example).

We know from the way in which few pre-Norse names survive — perhaps only the island names, Unst, Yell and Fetlar — that Norse

linguistic culture swamped whatever “native” elements remained, and we must assume that this represents a real, political, takeover of power.

But for all this knowledge, mainly deduced by inference from Scandinavia and elsewhere, for the specific early references to Shetland are scanty, there is little to show in the way of physical remains. Only at Jarlshof is a sequence of buildings from the Norse settlement onwards clearly visible, and, even there, argument about the sequence continues. Buildings of a somewhat later date have been revealed by excavation at Underhoull (Unst), da Biggins (Papa Stour) and Sandwick (Unst). The first and last-named are still visible, although ruinous. Other buildings, possibly of early Norse date, can be discerned at a few unexcavated sites, notably Belmont (Unst), Gossabrough (Yell) and Catpund (South Mainland). The promontory sites discussed in the last chapter seem to include some Norse ones.

There are a small number of other sites that may be Norse: possible boat burials at Wick of Aith (Fetlar) and Breckon (Yell) and doubtless many standing stones are of Norse date, originating as sailing marks.

Apart from the material from excavated sites, early Norse objects are remarkable scarce, with a few splendid exceptions such as the brooches from Oxna and Gulberwick. Some sand-dune sites regularly produce small items, such as fragments of composite bone combs or blue glass beads, but even so there is really very little evidence compared with, say, the Neolithic.

With the coming together of early history and archaeology, more complicated questions can be asked, such as where on Papa Stour was the farm owned by Duke Malcolm in 1299. But for the present purpose it is enough to restrict discussion to three simple questions: what were the physical structures built by the early Norse settlers, where do these survive to be seen, and why are there no more of them.

Although rectangular houses may already have existed in small numbers, the Norse settlers certainly deserve the credit for transforming typical Shetland house-plans from curvilinear to rectilinear, although some of their earlier houses have bowed rather than straight long walls. So far as the evidence from Jarlshof goes, Norse houses began as relatively simple halls, apparently designed for a largely communal life, and gradually developed greater subdivision, with extra units being added to the end or side of existing houses as need, status or fashion changed. Individual houses were rebuilt or modified repeatedly, indeed the earliest Norse dwelling at Jarlshof was in use for two centuries.

Such houses varied considerably in plan. The larger ones had stone walls (except that one gable was sometimes of wood), and had thatched

gable-ended roofs supported by rows of posts running down the the centre of the floor. Smaller examples were of stone or (probably, for none survive) of turf or even wood, with roofs supported on the wall-heads alone. In the larger houses long, kerbed, central hearths were flanked by raised benches used both for eating and sleeping: as in earlier periods, except in severe weather Shetlanders lived out of doors much more than today. At one end of the dwelling a partitioned area formed the kitchen. Smaller houses probably combined all functions in a single room. (See Plate 6).

Outhouses proliferated. Byres and barns, some with kilns, have been found at Jarlshof, although one excavator's identification of a "bath-house" seems to stretch the evidence a little! At Sandwick (Unst), excavation revealed a byre doorway which solved a long standing problem: the foundation plans of "byres" at Jarlshof had entrances too narrow to allow fully grown cattle, even diminutive ones, to enter or leave. At Sandwick the entrance survived to a metre high, and was very clearly cow-shaped — it broadened as it rose until, at waist-high, it was wide enough to allow cattle to pass through.

Many finds have been made in excavation: stone pots and net sinkers, hones for metal tools, bone needles and pins abound, but bone combs and glass beads, as well as a few small slate graffiti (pictures scratched on flat stones, Figure 4) suggest a less utilitarian side to life, as do the tiny model rotary querns from several sites, which can only be toys. When found away from excavations, many of these objects are hard to identify positively as Norse: only rare examples, fine metalwork, delicately worked bone pins and a few distinctive hones are easily recognised as of Viking date.

When the first settlers arrived from what is now Norway, they were pagans, and pagan burials have been found. Characteristic of such burials are bronze "tortoise" brooches, which usually occur in pairs. Other stray finds, like the Oxna and Gulberwick brooches may also be from burials. There is little to suggest that such fine objects were made locally. It is quite possible that there are undiscovered pagan Viking graves, for there has been no systematic search. Characteristically these graves are oval, or pointed-oval in plan, and from four to six metres long, formed of low mounds of small stones and kerbed by larger stones, often set upright. (See Plate 7).

Disappointingly for archaeologists, the new population was converted to Christianity not long after they arrived, and deposition of grave-goods became rare.

Interestingly, in view of the usual picture of Viking predispositions,

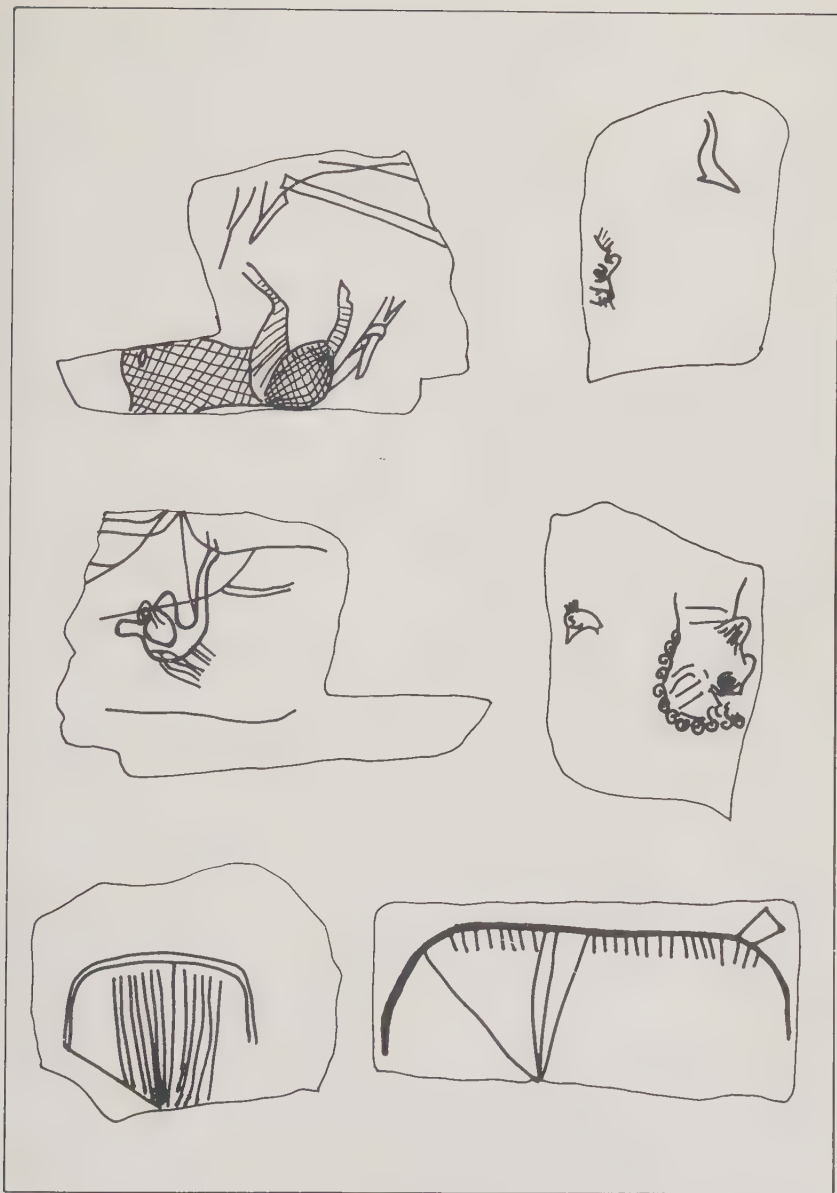


Figure 4
Norse graffiti: pictures scratched on slate, perhaps artists' trial pieces,
from Jarlshof

there seems to have been a degree of toleration for the established Christian sites, and place-names with “papa” elements suggest that Christian communities survived. Even the name has a message, for there is a gentle pun on the Norse word for “puffin”, and certainly carvings of clerics on the Papil stone suggest the pun was based on a real resemblance, both in profile and in choice of habitation sites. The pagan Norse religion was not an evangelistic one, and it is easy to picture the Viking settler shaking his head in wonderment over the “crazy Christians” living on promontories and stacks.

It does seem that the Norse population, once Christianised, adopted local ways, and various remote sites, such as Strandibrough (Fetlar) and Kirkholm (West Mainland) seem to have monastic establishments with Norse-style house foundations, as already mentioned. But it is also likely that an admixture of pagan belief lingered, and as in Pictish times it may well have been only a minority who were actually practising Christians. No evidence for early Norse churches comparable with that from Orkney has so far been discovered, although tradition points out the site of churches of 11th or 12th century type, with round towers, at Papil and Tingwall.

Although it was known and used before, the Norse settlers seem to have expanded the exploitation of soapstone, from the main outcrop at Cunningsburgh to smaller outcrops at Hillswick, Fethaland and elsewhere. On more remote outcrops traces of Viking-period working can still be seen, but at more accessible areas, such as Catpund, at Cunningsburgh, later quarrying has removed early forms. Chisel marks and the cores of bowls can be seen, as can large heaps of “wasters” (fragments broken in manufacture) and chippings. This easily worked material, with which the settlers were familiar from their homeland, was an important resource for making vessels, loom weights and net sinkers, spindle-whorls and even jewellery — pendants and armlets are known. It may be more than coincidence that the main outcrop is at Cunningsburgh — “the King’s fort”.

But where are all the houses of the Viking settlers? Only a handful of settlement sites are known, while we can list over a hundred sites from the earlier Iron Age. The answer is twofold. Firstly, ordinary houses of any period are often relatively slight structures, and it may be that wood or turf was used as a building material. But secondly, and more important, is the fact that many modern crofts bear Norse names, and occupy sites which fulfil the ideal for Norse settlement: above the farmland, overlooking the bay and with easy access to the hill grazing

lands. It seems that the Viking farms lie below their later replacements: an idea proved at da Biggins in Papa Stour.

Many Shetlanders display an extreme attachment to their "Viking ancestry", and this can cause problems for the student of anthropology or history, for both the historical and anatomical evidence suggests a very mixed ancestry with the Norse not preponderant. But at least for their homes the Shetlanders can claim an unchallenged Norse pedigree: in shape, organisation and location the changes since the Norse settlement remained essentially cosmetic until relatively recently, at least for those buildings which housed ordinary folk.

At some stage in the Mediaeval period the so-called "Norse mill" was introduced to Shetland. In fact, these mills may well be a late introduction, and they may also not be Norse in origin: there is evidence that the idea was borrowed. None of the countless ruined mills which line almost every stream in Shetland can be dated earlier than the eighteenth century: such integral parts of the agricultural economy would have been heavily maintained and regularly rebuilt in situ, and finding a Viking mill would be looking for a needle in a haystack.

But the subject of "Norse mills" is one that draws us towards our conclusion. This survey of the remains of early Shetlanders has repeatedly thrown up instances of dating "by tradition" that have stood up to archaeological scrutiny. Shetland tradition recognises various "folk", who are associated with various types of ruin. The "trows" (trolls) or "peerie folk" are associated with various pre-Iron Age sites, such as houses at Trolligarts, or the numerous burnt mounds ("trowie knowes"). In every case "trow" attributions appear to refer to pre-Iron age sites. Next come the "Picts", and they built the brochs, and forts, and a few green mounds. Again, while not the Picts the art-historian knows, the attributed sites all appear to be of broadly Iron Age date. The mysterious "Finns" mentioned above, possibly pre-Norse and certainly contemporary with the "Picts" have only one definite traditional association: the Funzie Girt, a great stone bank meandering across north and east Fetlar. Next again come the Vikings, or Norsemen. Anything dating before the date of full recorded history is likely to be labelled "Viking" or "Norse", but interestingly, the label is very rarely applied to pre-Norse remains. Last of all, and outwith the scope of this survey, are the Dutchmen, who receive credit for miscellaneous mounds and buildings near to the shore.

So far as one can test Shetland tradition, it is both consistent from area to area and accurate in broad terms. If there are going to be major

advances in our understanding of the ways of Shetland's early inhabitants, it may be that archaeologists should stop showing surprise when local traditions are vindicated and start using those traditions to guide research. Who better to understand the prehistory of Shetland than a crofter living in a house on a thousand-year old site and farming in a style essentially unchanged for even longer. In Shetland, more than most places perhaps, prehistory, history and tradition are woven together in a way which can allow valid inferences about the past.

So as visitors view the archaeological remains discussed here, let them remember that these are the vestiges of real people, individuals whose works have been preserved by the random hand of fate. And look around at the green fields and remember how the soil of each green acre was won painstakingly from barren moorland. The past is very close to the surface in Shetland, and in Shetlanders.

As a local antiquarian put it "in short, there must have taken place the same constant warfare against cold and hunger that has ever gone on in Shetland".



Plate 7

Breckon: ruined boat-shaped burial of probable pagan Norse date. In the middle distance a prehistoric boundary wall and a Bronze Age cairn.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)



Plate 8

Cullingsburgh: At least four phases of croft buildings on left. On right, within rectangular wall, is an early chapel (11th or 12th century AD) within oval enclosure of earlier date. The mound below far corner of wall is a ruined broch.

(Photo: Mike Brooks, HBM, Crown Copyright)

Site Guide

This is a selected list of archaeological remains. While it includes the best examples of most classes, the list is not comprehensive, and some good sites are omitted because they are hard to reach, while a few sites have been included because they have fine settings, although the visible remains may be poor. The best-preserved sites are marked by an asterisk, and these would serve the person on a flying visit, or those with only a passing interest in prehistory. The list is arranged by area: Unst, Yell, Fetlar, Whalsay, North Mainland, Bressay, South and Central Mainland, West Mainland. Small islands are dealt with in the sections for the adjacent land area. Within each region the order is that of the text: broadly chronological. Where possible, examples of each period are provided for each area. Each site has its reference on the National Grid, and visitors would be well advised to obtain the four sheets of the 1:50000 Ordnance Survey map for Shetland, for these maps have many additional monuments marked upon them. Almost all of the sites described here are marked on these sheets.

The inclusion of a site here does not in any way guarantee right of access. A few sites (Jarlshof, Clickhimin, Ness of Burgi, Stanydale) are in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and access is permitted at all times, except at Jarlshof, which has set opening hours and a small admission charge. Most of the other sites are open to any visitor who takes care not to damage walls or fences, shuts gates, keeps dogs on the leash and generally behaves responsibly. When in doubt about access, always ask: the author has never been refused access to a Shetland site, and thanks the hospitable Shetlanders accordingly.

One last word: some of these are structures which have stood for four thousand years. They represent the legacy of past generations who have left no other record of their passing. Archaeological sites are precious remnants, part of our national heritage. Visitors should not scramble over crumbling walls, or try their hand at a little rebuilding, but leave the monuments as they find them, so that future generations will be able to enjoy the pleasure of searching out, for themselves, the traces of their earliest ancestry.

In visiting Shetland sites, it is as well to remember that they may be some distance from roads, and in barren country. Be sure that you are fit enough, and well-clothed: Shetland's weather can change swiftly. Take a map and compass, and be able to use them.

After these strictures: good visiting. Once the sites in this list have been exhausted, there are many more on the Ordnance Survey map worth examining, and there is always the possibility of discovering new remains, even in more settled parts, once the observer knows what to seek.

UNST (Map 1)

1. Hill of Caldback, HP 607067. Two heel-shaped cairns stand on this hill. The one on the summit is badly delapidated, but measures about 16 metres across, with a facade on the eastern side. There are no clear signs of cist or chamber. The lower cairn, at the foot of the slope on the west side of the hill, is better preserved, and of similar dimensions. The facade is framed by two orthostats, and the cairn is unusual in having three cists, but no entrance passage and chamber. This is the only definite example of the combination of heel-shaped cairn and cists.

(The hill is west of the highest point on the Baltasound-Uyeasound road)

2. Watlee, HP 596051. A smaller cairn, 10m in diameter, with vague traces of a central chamber. A small oval foundation on the north side is later.

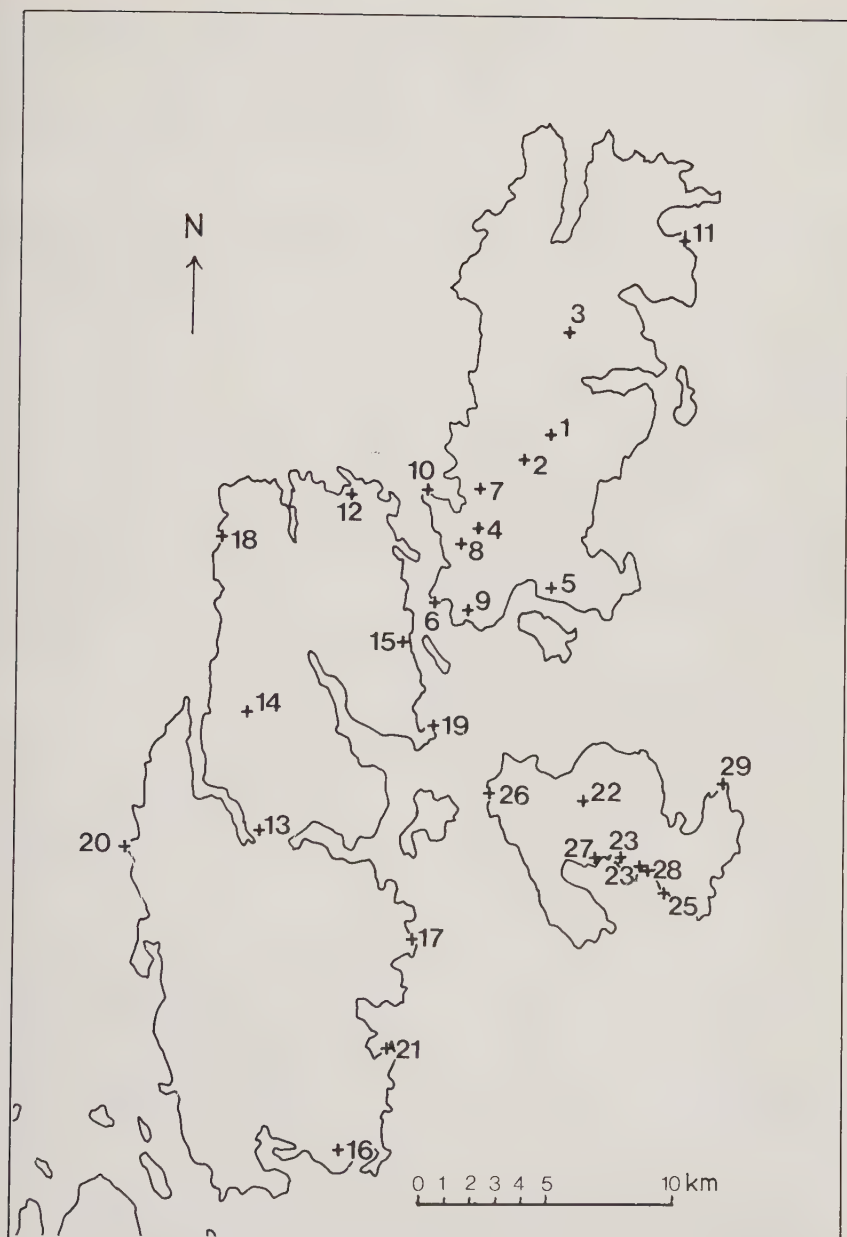
(The cairn lies immediately west of the main road, overlooking Loch of Watlee)

3. Rounds of Tivla, HP 616107. Downhill from a group of three round cairns, one containing a cist, lies this group of three circular earthworks. Only one retains its recorded form, and this consists of three low concentric banks, with two shallow ditches between, surrounding a central stony spread some 9 metres in diameter. The ruined sites nearby were apparently of similar character. Possibly, this could be a Bronze Age burial monument of a type related to the enclosed cremation cemeteries of more southern parts.

(1 kilometre north-east of Gue, Baltasound, near the top of Crussa Field)

4. *Bordastubble, HP 578034. Possibly the most massive of the Shetland standing stones, this example is of gneiss, stands 3.8 metres high and is up to 2.7 metres thick. Traces of packing stones can be seen at the foot of the stone, but it is not certain that these are original, rather than an attempt to prop up the block, which leans towards the south-west.

(North of the road to Lund)



Map 1
Sites described in Unst, Yell and Fetlar

5. ***Clivocast**, HP 606007 and HP 604005. A narrow stone, 3 metres tall but only 0.9 metres wide at the base, stands on the slopes above Uyea Sound. A second, squat, monolith stands downslope, and a possible Viking grave was found many years ago near the latter stone.

(South of the road to Muness, on the hill out of Uyeasound).

6. ***Belmont**, HP 557006. The broch is completely ruined, but around it is a most impressive set of defences. A deep ditch cuts off the angle of coast on which the broch stands. The inner face of this has been edged with a stone wall, which survives best at the western end of the ditch, beyond the approach causeway on that side. Beyond this ditch's outer rampart is a second, slighter, ditch.

(Around shore to west of ferry terminal at Belmont).

7. ***Underhoull**, HP 574044. Once again, a ruined broch with strong defences. The broch stands on the edge of a steep slope. The sides not protected by this have been surrounded with two ditches, with massive earthen ramparts inside each. The back of the inner rampart has been covered by rubble from the broch. The only feature of the broch which can be discerned is the outer end of the entrance passage, which is on the north, where a causeway runs through the ramparts, which are faced with stone in this portion of their circuit.

(West of the road as it begins to descend into the Westing).

8. **Snabrough**, HP 567027. In a similar, though less exposed, situation is the ruined broch of Snabrough. A number of sub-rectangular house foundations can be seen within an enclosing bank which may post-date the broch.

(1 kilometre north-west of the head of Loch of Snarravoe)

9. **Mula**, HU 573999. A small oval house foundation is associated with clearance mounds and burnt stones, while nearby field banks may be contemporary in date. The site has produced pottery of wheelhouse type, and illustrates the longevity of the simple oval house in Shetland.

(South-east from Belmont ferry terminal, in the middle of the land of the abandoned croft).

10. **Blue Mull**, HP 557045. On a headland above steep cliffs may be seen seven oblong building foundations, arranged in a line. The headland has been delimited by a low bank, which does not seem to have been defensive.

(1 kilometre north-west of Lund Church)

11. Bugar Stack, HP 661140. Slight traces of foundations occur on this rock stack, which is joined to the shore by a dangerous rock ridge. *(800m due east of Millfield, on east side of Kirkaton, Norwick. View from the safety of the hill above).*

(7) Underhoull, HP 574044. Downhill from the broch are the ruins of early Norse houses excavated in the 1960's, but now falling into disrepair. The houses here overlaid a Pictish period settlement of round houses. *(200m downhill from Underhoull broch).*

YELL (Map 1)

12. Breckon, HP 528053. A rather ruinous oval house is one of the features of this sand-dune area, which also has several nondescript cairns and enclosures, as well as a possible Viking grave (see below). *(Follow track from Breckon farm).*

13. Windhouse, HU 487917. This heel-shaped cairn has been built on a steep slope, with the facade, built of very large blocks, facing west, downslope. The body of the cairn merges with the slope behind. *(North of the road at the head of Whale Firth)*

14. Lumbister, HU 487964. On an area of grass to the east of a ruined sheep pen is a linear setting of small boulders. These are arranged in three parallel lines running from north-east to south-west; each about 60 metres long and spaced about 15 metres apart. The central line is crossed by a short line of larger boulders, oriented north-south and closer spaced. This is the best known example in Shetland of a type of monument common in Caithness. *(On the south shore of Loch of Lumbister, reached up the valley from the road at Colvister).*

15. Gutcher, HU 548985. A modest standing stone, of grey gneiss, overlooks the ferry crossing to Fetlar. *(500m south of the ferry terminal, above the shore).*

16. Kettlester, HU 511800. One of the few burnt mounds in the North Isles, this example is still quite large, although much spread by agriculture. *(Just south of the road at Kettlester)*

17. *Aywick, HU 546873. This is a miniature bivallate fort, with three ramparts and two ditches. The ramparts stand up to 1.8 metres in height.

The enclosed area has been somewhat eroded, but can never have been very large. So far as can be seen, the ramparts are made solely of earth and small stones.

(1 kilometre east-north-east of Aywick)

18. *Burgi Geos, HP 478034. This remote site has one of the most spectacular locations of any defensive place in Shetland. A promontory formed by two narrow clefts in the cliffs has been cut off by an artificial ditch. Beyond the ditch can still be seen the remains of a dry stone structure, one wall showing of what may have been a blockhouse similar to that at Loch of Huxter. This wall runs right to the cliff edge on the northern side. Outside the ditch, a pathway runs towards the fort, edged by upright stones set like teeth into a mound of earth. This device is usually an extra defence, but here it seems to be intended to prevent those approaching from falling over the cliff. There are traces of fields and clearance cairns on the hill to the east, and these may well be contemporary with the fort.

(On the uninhabited west coast of North Yell. A track runs from Gloup up Gloup Voe. From the head of the voe, the route lies due west up Rule's Gill and over the moorland. Not for the unfit)

19. *Burra Ness, HU 557957. Only the seaward portion of this broch has survived, but this still reaches 3 metres from the ground. At the southern end of the visible remains is the wreck of a wallbase cell, perhaps once a guard cell. The broch has been surrounded, on the landward side, by a pair of earthen ramparts, and there are many small foundations within these. Behind the broch, the flat land is dotted with many clearance cairns.

(Road from Cunnister to Kirkabister, then track out to headland)

(12) Breckon, HP 528053. A pointed-oval, or boat-shaped, setting of flat slabs protrudes from the sandy soil. This may be the remains of a Viking-period burial (Plate 7).

20. Birrier of West Sandwick, HU 438913. This faces another eremitic establishment, Isbister, across Yell Sound, and although less well preserved, the small dwellings characteristic of that site can be seen here also. They are arranged in two rows which form an L-shape.

(Track to Harkland, then north-west to Birriesgirt Loch: the site is on a promontory below the slope of the hill. The ridge linking the stack to the shore is dangerous)

FETLAR (Map 1)

21. Gossabrough, HU 534833. To the north and east of the mound formed by the ruined broch are the remains of what may be early Norse dwellings. If this is the case, the settlement may be as extensive as that at Jarlshof.

(Behind the farm buildings at Gossabrough)

22. Hjaltadans, HU 618928. A ring of large blocks surrounds a flat area, within which is a low circular earthen bank. In the centre are two large blocks of stone, standing side by side. The date, period and function are unknown.

(750 metres north of Fetlar airstrip. On Bird Reserve, check first with warden)

23. Ripple Stone, HU 627905. A 2.3 metre tall block of schist, this is an unusually slender standing stone for Shetland, being 1 metre by 40 centimetres at the base, and tapering above this.

(Between road and sea at east end of Feal)

24. Swainkatofts, HU 632901. This small burnt mound is a fairly typical example. Like Unst and Yell, Fetlar does not appear to have many burnt mounds.

(150m S of road, just past farm access)

25. Aithbank, HU 642897. The promontory called Winna Tanga is crossed by three much reduced rubble banks, and is almost certainly a promontory fort.

(200 metres south of Aithbank)

26. Snabrough, HU 577933. This badly eroded fort has been claimed as a former broch site, on no good evidence. A last fragment of masonry, probably part of a blockhouse, is flanked on the shoreward side by two substantial banks and broad ditches. Pottery has been found in the shoreline section.

(750m north of the old slipway at Brough Lodge)

27. Houbie, HU 620903. The foundations of a broch, 18m in outer diameter, stand on a low platform flanked by a broad ditch and outer bank. A second bank appears on the north-west side, where the approach is easiest.

28. Giants Grave, HU 638899. A possible pagan Norse grave is represented by an oval mound of stones some 10m by 5.

(Overlooking Wick of Aith, on the west side)

29. *Strandibrough, HU 670930. This monastic site, of probable Norse date, has two elements, which were possibly once linked by a bridge or causeway. On the Outer Brough, a detached stack, are the remains of long houses with slightly bowed walls. The buildings on the stack may represent the monastic centre, while similar ones on the main island may represent a farm which would have helped support the community.

Remains of small buildings also exist upon the Clett (HU 642945), an almost inaccessible stack 3km to the west. These may have formed a hermitage founded from the main centre, and used as a retreat for solitude.

(Road to Everland, then north-north-east to end of island)

WHALSAY & SKERRIES (Map 2)

30. *Bunzie House, HU 587653. This fine example of a clover-leaf plan house and the nearby house, known as the Yoxie "temple", were excavated by the investigator of Stanydale. Despite the presence of a number of cairns of possible heel-shaped plan in the vicinity, there is no reason to suppose that either structure was anything other than a typical farmhouse.

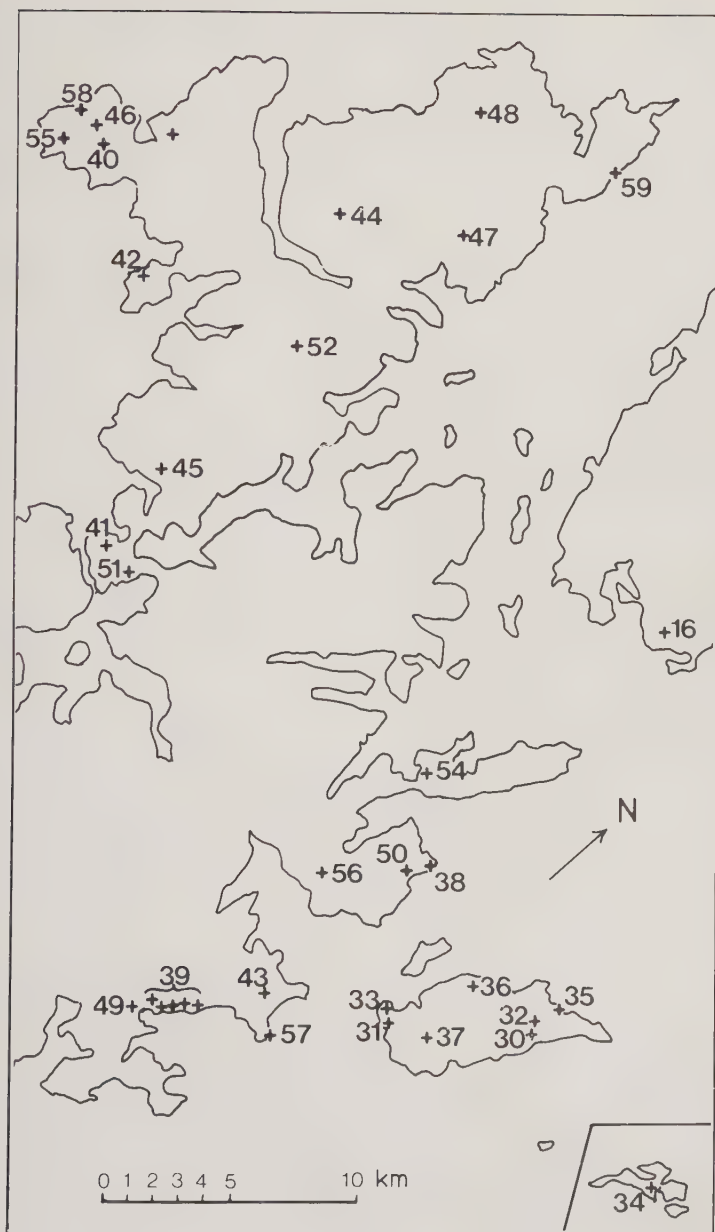
(Above the shore just over one kilometre north-east of Isbister)

31. *Loch of Sandwick, HU 536618. Remains of at least four prehistoric houses of various plans, together with two burnt mounds and several stretches of walling occupy a substantial area on the northern side of Sand Wick.

(300-600m west of road, down hill from Sandwick crofts)

32. *Pettigarths Field, HU 585653. On the rise above the Bunzie House (see above) is a miniature heel-shaped cairn, reduced to its foundations. The cairn has a diameter of only 5 metres, and the chamber, which is polygonal, is 1 metre across. It has a narrow passage leading to it from the facade. A cist, possibly a later addition, lies to the north of the chamber, and has at one time been covered by an extension to the mound. This can only be seen by the few stones left of the covering material.

(On the rise north-west of, and overlooking, the Bunzie House)



Map 2

Sites described in Whalsay, Skerries, North Mainland and Muckle Roe

33. Ward of Symbister, HU 533620. A rather ruinous cairn, with traces of a kerb, in a superb location.

(Summit of hill, south-west of ferry pier)

34. Battle Pund, Skerries, HU 684713. This irregular setting of boulders, some 13m across, recalls Hjaltadans (Fetlar), and may be of Bronze Age date.

(Clearly visible to south of Sunnyside)

35. Skaw Voe, HU 589665. A large boulder, 1.5m high, stands 50m from the shore, and nearby are two fallen or broken stones which once stood upright.

(Middle of bay, halfway between road and sea)

36. *Brough, HU 555651. Two groups of pecked cup-marks occur on the east side of a rock outcrop. Such cup-marks, believed to be of Bronze Age date, are very rare in Shetland. There are at least 30 marks, in two groups.

(West of the road, 110m south of its right angled bend)

(31) Loch of Sandwick, HU 538616. Two medium-sized burnt mounds, neither particularly distinguished from the average, lie on damp ground, to the east of the prehistoric houses.

(To the south of the loch)

37. Loch of Huxter, HU 558620. A small islet has been connected to the shore by a causeway of rubble. Where this reaches the islet, a small blockhouse, now ruined, stands. This formerly stood over 2 metres tall, and had an upper gallery. The rest of the islet is surrounded by a stone wall 1.5 metres thick which is later than the blockhouse, although not necessarily by an lengthy period.

(On the southern shore of the loch)

EAST AND NORTH MAINLAND (Map 2)

38. *Lunning, HU 510671. A well-preserved prehistoric house, standing to 1m high. The structure is 10m in diameter, with a thick wall surrounding an interior which has traces of four alcoves. The entrance was on the south side, where there is an annexe, or a small yard. To the north-east is a small field or yard, and to the east some field walling is visible.

(150m south of trig point on Lunning Head)

39. *Newing, HU 467559 to HU 477567. A remarkable series of prehistoric houses and enclosures, together with clearance cairns and walls, lie along the North Nesting road. A small house in a field system lies 200m west of the deserted croft at South Newing (HU 46755), and another immediately east of the road 100m east of the croft (HU 470559), has a windbreak outside its entrance. 500m along the road, beyond North Newing, and at the foot of the road embankment, is a third example (HU 474565). This is roughly circular, with numerous walls nearby. 170m further, and near the east side of the road, is an oval house 8m by 7, with its entrance on the south east and an enclosure attached to its south-west side. The final example (HU 477567) immediately beside the road on the east, lies 120m beyond, and is 8m by 6, again with an entrance on the south east side.

39a. There is also a burnt mound nearby, just south of the third house described above, beside a small burn.

(Along road from South Nesting to Bretabister)

40. Black Water, Eshaness, HU 229786. A ruinous oval house of rather small dimensions.

(Immediately to the north of the main road, 300 metres beyond the turnoff for Leascole)

41. *Culsetter, Mavis Grind, HU 335675. A well-preserved field system, incorporating four houses, one of which, an oval 11 metres by 9, is apparently of a similar plan to the house at Gruting School. There are many clearance cairns, and a number of “rude stone implements”, mainly stone bar-shape tips, have been found in this area.

(North end of Bays Water, 1 kilometre north west of Busta)

42. Grevasound, Hillswick, HU 274762. An oval house, with many traces of field boundaries and cairns.

(On a dip in the ridge on the west side of Hillswick peninsula, just under 1 kilometre south-west of the road end)

43. East Hill of Bellister, HU 492592. A possible heel-shaped cairn, with a straight facade on the south-east side and a few large stones, possibly indicating a chamber and passage, within a tumble of smaller stones 10m by 12.

(On hillside, facing south-east, 1 km north of Housabister)

44. *Ronas Hill, HU 305835. This, one of the best preserved chambered tombs in Shetland, stands on the summit of the highest hill in

the islands. The chamber, which is built of large granite blocks, is still roofed, although much of the cairn material has been scattered over the surrounding slopes. Doubtless the chamber has survived because it provides a shelter in an exposed spot. The interior is rectangular, 1 metre by 1.25 metres, and 1 metre high. A remnant of the entrance passage leads into the chamber, and this is the inner end of a formerly longer passage, which led from the outside of a cairn of about 15 metres in diameter. There is little trace of the outer edge of the cairn, which may have been round or, more likely, heel-shaped.

(Via Collafirth Hill or the head of Ronas Voe. Not for the unfit of ill-equipped)

45. *Punds Water, Mangaster, HU 325713. This is the best surviving heel-shaped cairn on the Mainland (only that on the uninhabited island of Vementry survives better), and represents an extreme type of plan. The body of the cairn is 15 metres by 12, and has the outer ends of the facade prolonged into "horns" reminiscent of cairns in Caithness. Within the body of the cairn, and entered from a passage leading from the centre of the concave facade, is a small rectangular chamber with two small alcoves. The main compartment is about 2 metres square.

(1 kilometre west of highest point on side road to Mangaster)

46. Muckla Water, Eshaness, HU 222788. This cairn, also known as the March Cairn, is a rather squarish example of the heel-shaped type. The remains of a facade can be seen on the northern side, framed by uprights, but excavation proved that the small square chamber within was entered from the eastern side, a most unusual arrangement

(500 metres north of the junction of the Priesthoulland road)

47. Housetter, North Roe, HU 362855. A sadly ruined cairn, with the facade facing east. The overall diameter has been about 9 metres, and the inner chamber, of trefoil plan, is 3 metres by 2 internally. The nearby Giant's Stones may well be the terminal orthostats of a similar cairn which has otherwise been completely scattered. High on the rocky hill to the west of the Giant's Stones is a very well preserved, but miniscule, chambered cairn (HU 360855).

(To the west of the road. The small cairn is a steep scramble and it requires patience to locate it)

48. *Beorgs of Uyea, North Roe, HU 327900. A large outcrop of felsite has been quarried to produce a hollow, which has been roofed. The

felsite was used for the production of polished stone knives and axes, and the litter from the roughing-out of these tools lies all around the quarry pit. It includes semi-finished rough-outs, abandoned before final polishing began. This is the most easily found of a number of working floors spread across the nearby slopes, where this favoured rock-type outcrops in many places.

(Track runs west from North Roe School for three kilometres, then swings north-west. Route to site is along south shore of the Mill Loch beyond this change in direction. A tall, modern, cairn lies on the skyline, and the working site is reached just before this. A rough walk, across unfrequented moorland)

49. *Skellister, HU 463552. A 3m tall standing stone, consisting of an irregular, pointed block of sandstone.

(Prominent, on a shelf above the junction of the main road and that for Skellister)

50. Lunning, HU 506668. A 2m tall stone, of grey conglomerate.

(Just beyond the public road's end)

51. *Busta, Brae, HU 349674. A huge monolith of granite, 3.2 metres high and about 1.6 metres wide and broad at the base, stands on the slope of the hill, near to another large block, which may have been a companion stone, now fallen. The Busta stone is a useful sailing mark, although surely far too large to have been erected for that function.

(East of the road to Busta, clearly visible from Brae)

52. Yamni Field, HU 334773. This tapering granite boulder, 1.6 metres high, stands on a western shoulder of the hill amid a litter of smaller blocks. Its location is not particularly easily noticed.

(800 metres east of the Hillswick junction)

53. *Hamnavoe, Eshaness, HU 243806. "The Giant's Stones" are a pair of upright slabs, one 1.8 metres tall, the other 2.4 metres. A third stone, recorded in 1774, has since vanished. The stones lie in an east-west line, but the significance of this is not clear. They may be sailing marks for the bay below.

(North of the road, beyond Scarff)

54. Lunna, HU 484697 and HU 485695. Two fairly undistinguished and typical burnt mounds, lying on rather damp ground.

(The first lies 250m north of the second, which is beside the shore on the east side of West Lunna Voe)

55. Crosskirk, Eshaness, HU 215780. A large crescentic mound, with two stones of a probable trough visible.

(Beside Loch of Breckon, south of the road to lighthouse)

56. Burga Water, HU 481641. A small dun occupies an islet. Walling can be seen on the south and east sides.

(At south end of loch, best approached from minor road to east)

57. Hog Island Sound, HU 508581. This promontory fort has been cut off by the sea. The ramparts preserved on the landward side of the channel are three in number, with a central entrance-way (Plate 2).

(At extreme end on promontory, 700m east of Neap)

58. *Loch of Houlland, Eshaness, HU 213793. This broch is filled with rubble, but the outer face is visible all round, standing to 2 metres above the encircling debris. The entrance is on the south-west side, and has had a guard cell on the right. Two ruined cells can be seen in the thickness of the wall foundations. The promontory on which the broch stands has been cut off by a stone-faced rubble bank, which contains, as well as the broch, a large number of sub-rectangular and oval foundations, some of which are clearly later than the broch. More walling has been added across the neck of the promontory at this phase, and the island in the loch beside the broch has been connected to the settlement area by a causeway. This site is the clearest unexcavated example of a conversion of a broch to an open settlement. The island would have served as a place of safekeeping for domestic animals.

(Due north of the road, leaving this 500 metres before the lighthouse)

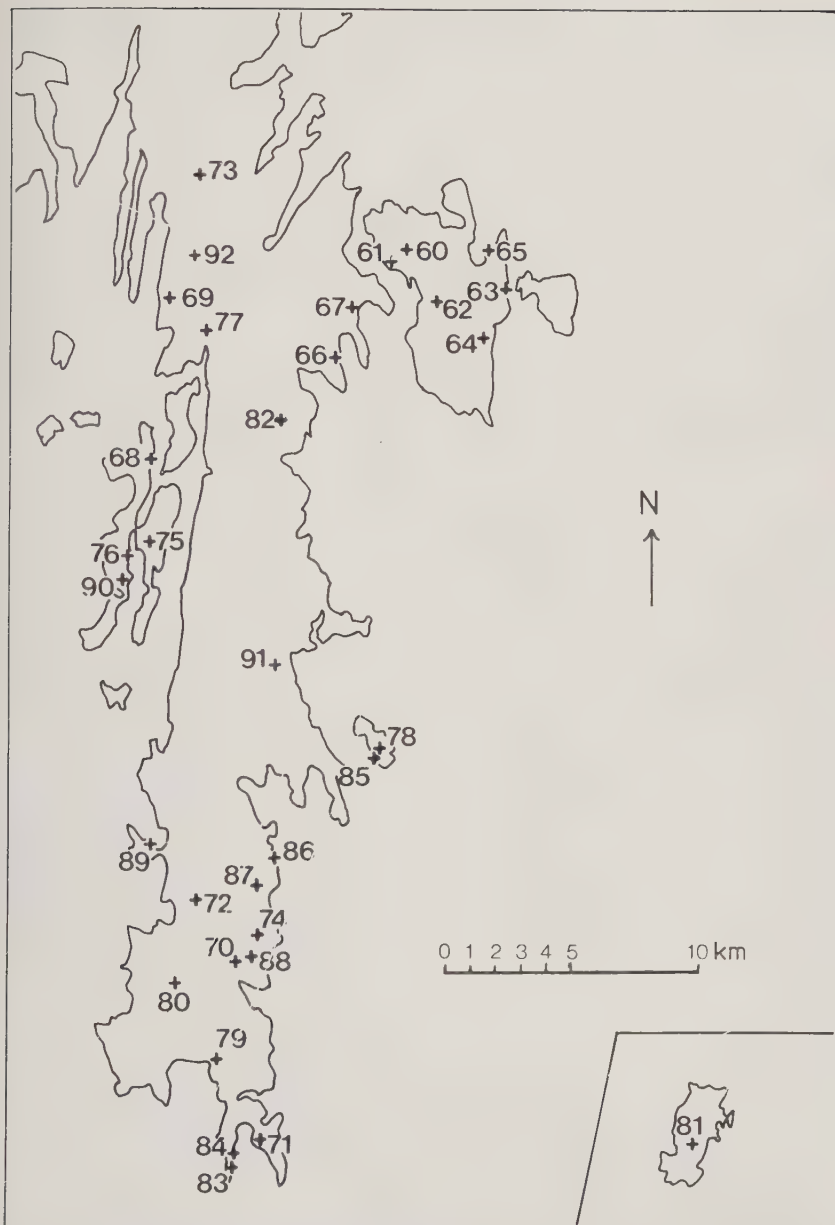
59. *Kame of Isbister, North Roe, HU 382915. On a steep slope above Yell Sound are the remains of 23 small, sub-rectangular dwellings, each one only about 3 metres by 6 metres. They are arranged in two rows. The only approach to the site is a crumbling rocky ridge.

(N from Isbister to loch, then along clifftops. Best viewed from the south, as the approach is dangerous)

BRESSAY (Map 3)

60. Hill of Cruester, HU 490428. A 3m high block of sandstone, with a distinct tilt.

(Heogan road, then road past Keldabister, left onto track and follow this north)



Map 3

Sites described in Bressay, Burra, Fair Isle, Central and South Mainland

61. Cruester, HU 483424. A large oval, 20 metres by 15, this burnt mound was excavated, partially, many years ago, and contained a small oval chamber with a corbelled roof. This was possibly part of a domestic building associated with the mound.

(On the shore, north-west of Gardie House)

62. Midgarth, HU 500409. A large mound, but suffering from the trampling of cattle, this is of typical kidney-shape plan, and is about 11 metres long and 1 metre high. No trough is visible.

(In the valley south of the road across the island, opposite the side road to Hoversta)

63. Noss Sound, HU 528410. A large ruined broch, with traces of cells within the walls, is flanked by two very substantial banks of earth, which seem originally to have had drystone faces. The location is unusual, being easily overlooked from nearby high ground.

(At the end of the road to Noss ferry point)

64. Grimsetter, HU 516395. This earth-house, or souterrain, is of the typical (small) Shetland variety, and is frequently rather damp.

(Follow track past west side of Loch of Grimsetter, the site lies on the low saddle between the loch and the small valley of Seligeo)

65. Cullingsburgh, HU 522423. St Mary's Chapel, now ruined but with the graveyard still in use, stands on the site of an earlier chapel, which stood in turn upon a ruined and scattered broch. The only trace of the earlier foundation is a portion of the enclosure bank, which can be seen within the graveyard. The site has produced a number of carbed stones, all in the Pictish style and all with Christian motifs. It is possible that Cullingsburgh was the eastern equivalent to Pail, a centre for a large part of Shetland. The nearby ruined crofts are a fine group of buildings, with evidence for many phases of alteration (Plate 8).

(Road to Setter, then track round south side of Voe of Cullingsburgh)

CENTRAL AND SOUTH MAINLAND (Map 3)

66. Sound, HU 458392. A ruined house, 10m by 7m, lies on a small terrace. The entrance seems to be on the west side. Another, more ruined structure, lies 100m to the north, and may also be a house.

(West side of Voe of Sound at Punds Geo 1km from the head of the voe)

67. *Clickhimin, Lerwick, HU 464408. A small, well-rebuilt, oval house of clover-leaf plan can be seen at this predominantly Iron Age site.

The house represents the first phase of a long use of the site, and may have had other, less substantial, buildings around it. Guardianship monument, restricted hours, no charge.

(Signposted, to right of road leaving Lerwick for south)

68. Ux Ness, West Burra, HU 383357. A small, oval house with large blocks forming the partitions between the internal alcoves. A boundary wall encloses the house and a number of clearance cairns.

(Immediately beyond the end of the bridge from Trondra, above the road)

69. Jamie Cheyne's Loch, Scalloway, HU 398428. A well-preserved house of oval form, showing internal divisions. The surrounding slopes are dotted with cairns and fragments of walling, the remains of an extensive field system.

(100 metres south of the loch, on a moorland ridge)

70. *Dalsetter, HU 403157. Three oval houses lie within a fragmentary enclosure wall built of large blocks. Within the main enclosure are traces of slighter walls, and a number of clearance cairns testify to early agriculture. The houses are of medium size, from 10 to 12 metres in overall length.

(To right of road from Boddam to Troswick, on south-facing slope)

71. *Jarlshof, HU 399096. The earliest remains visible at this, the most complex excavated site in Shetland, comprise a cluster of smallish oval houses, which show the characteristic "clover-leaf" internal plan. These were replaced by a group of roughly circular houses, of similar size, towards the end of the Bronze Age. A number of querns, used for grinding grain, have been left in situ, and more artefacts can be seen in the site museum. Guardianship monument, limited opening hours, small charge.

(Signposted near Sumburgh Airport Hotel)

72. Ward of Scousburgh, HU 388188. One of the few surviving prehistoric cairns in the south, this is a scattered mound of rubble, with clear traces of a kerb defining an original diameter of 9.5m.

(On summit of hill, below trig point)

73. Wormadale Hill, Tingwall, HU 406460. What was once described as the only stone circle in Shetland consists of an untidy oval setting of

pointed upright blocks, now mostly fallen, and may never have been a true circle.

(Below the road, just before it reaches the top of the hill on the west side of Tingwall valley — once the new road is built the site will lie uphill from it)

74. *Troswick, HU 408166. A slab of sandstone 2.3 metres high, this stone stands close beside a field dyke, and may have functioned as a boundary marker, although it is hard to explain why, if this is the case, it is not incorporated in the nearby wall. Its size would suggest that it is of some antiquity, and has been used as a landmark, rather than erected to form one.

(300 metres south-south-east of Troswick farm)

75. Yaa Field, East Burra, HU 378328. A block of quartzose gneiss, 2 metres high and 1 metre broad, but only 15 centimetres thick in places, this stone is visible for a considerable distance in most directions.

(100 metres north-east of Norbister)

76. Mid Field, West Burra, HU 370326. Of similar height and material to the stone on Yaa Field (which is visible from here), this upright slab is much thicker, being almost square in section. Local legend ascribes to the stone the quality of indestructability, a power which natural weathering is slowly contradicting.

(To the left of the road, south of Bridgend)

77. Upper Scalloway, Tingwall, HU 408402. This burnt mound has been rather scattered by agriculture and quarrying, but can be seen clearly from the main road.

(At the junction of roads north of Scalloway, just west of Tingwall road)

78. *Mill Loch, Mousa, HU 460236. A much reduced burnt mound stands close beside a stream. It was originally of a horseshoe-shaped plan, but has now degenerated into two curved banks, whose concavities face each other across a central space within which can clearly be seen the edges of the slabs forming the cooking trough.

(North-east of the broch, at the west end of the Mill Loch — see Mousa broch for access)

79. Quendale, HU 385128. This mound stands in a rather unusual position, on a hillside some distance away from any good supply of water. The remains of a slab-built cooking trough can be seen on the

north side of an oval pile of stones which measures some 15 metres by 8 metres, and stands 1.5 metres high.

(500 metres west of junction of main road and track to coastguard station on Ward Hill)

80. Backsetter, HU 377156. A large crescentic mound stands in marshy ground, a typical location.

(At south end of Loch of Spiggie, just north of minor road)

81. Houlalie, Fair Isle, HZ 207716. By far the largest burnt mound in Shetland, this measures 39 metres by 27, and stands to 3 metres in height. It has been dug into in the past, but there is no record of what, if anything, was discovered. The mound is composite, and probably had several cooking places.

(On the slope north-east of Pund)

82. Loch of Brindister, Brindister, HU 433370. This island dun was excavated last century, and proved to have masonry walls 2.3 metres thick, standing to 1.8 metres in places. A single entrance, 1.6 metres wide, pierced the circle of walling. The site is ruined and inaccessible.

(Visible from main road, which passes to the east of the loch)

(67) *Clickhimin, Lerwick, HU 464408. The second main phase on this long-lived site saw the construction of a ring-wall, some 40 metres in diameter and 3 to 6 metres thick at the base. It probably bore a walkway and parapet, and the section of wall close to the entrance is expanded, thus lengthening the entrance passage, which is of a simple type, lacking the guard cells of some forts and most brochs. At a later date, an isolated blockhouse was built within the area, perhaps as the first element of some uncompleted reorganisation of the defences. This structure has many features of the brochs, notably the ledge, or scarcement, at the rear, and the hollow wall construction. A suggestion that a tall, wooden, galleried building stood behind the rectangular mass of the blockhouse is largely without support from the excavated evidence. Accommodation within the fort was provided by wooden lean-to ranges behind the wall. The whole fort was later superseded by a broch.

83. *Ness of Burgi, Scatness, HU 388085. This, the classic example of a blockhouse, has been excavated and laid out for visitors. A double ditch with intervening bank cuts off the promontory. Within this is a long rectangular block of masonry pierced by a narrow entrance passage and

containing three oval cells, one ruined. Guardianship monument, no restriction upon access.

(1 kilometre due south of the farm at the end of the public road)

84. Scatness North, HU 388087. On the next headland north, this fort was excavated in 1983 in advance of marine erosion. Before digging began a little masonry was visible within a double bank and ditch. Excavation revealed the surviving portion of a blockhouse very similar indeed to that at Ness of Burgi.

(North of Ness of Burgi, on the east coast of the peninsula)

(67) *Clickhimin, Lerwick, HU 464408. The broch in Clickhimin is the last in a series of Iron Age defences on the site. It stands on the centre of the islet, and is partially surrounded by rubble which may be either a foundation or later buttressing. Like most of Shetland's brochs, Clickhimin has a solid base. Two oval cells are contained in the wall, which is pierced by the normal narrow passage. An unusual feature is the secondary entrance high in the wall on the northern side. This small entrance is a rare feature, known only from five Scottish sites, and may have been for the convenience of the builders.

The arrangement of galleries and stairs is eccentric, with short stretches of stair linking discontinuous portions of gallery, none of which are particularly level. It is uncertain how much of this is the result of mid-nineteenth century restoration. A chamber over the entrance passage has spaced lintels on the floor which allow an occupant to see down into the passage, and the passage itself seems to have had a guard cell on the right hand side, which has been walled up at a later date. The difference in stonework can be clearly seen.

At a later date, around 200 AD, the broch was modified, by the insertion of an inner wall, to a wheelhouse. It may be significant that the inner wall is thickest just where the outer platform is absent, and the two, together with the blocking of the guard cell, may relate to incipient collapse, and represent shoring for the broch wall. Outside the broch, a number of houses were dug into, or became buried by, the fast accumulating midden material, which had previously been dumped over the fort wall into the loch. This suggests that there was less pressure on living space than during the broch phase. Some of the trackways between buildings were converted to covered passages. The last houses are flimsy huts, built high in the deposits. These have been largely removed to reveal earlier structures. Finds associated with the later phases suggest

that the broch went out of use as a defence about 200 AD and that the whole site was abandoned before the Norse settlement of Shetland.

85. *Mousa, Sandwick, HU 456237. This is the best-preserved broch in Scotland, standing to over 13 metres tall, little short of its likely original height. The base of the tower is narrow, being just over 15 metres wide, with walls 4.5 metres thick, giving a very solid foundation.

The basal level is pierced by a narrow entrance, with no guard cells. In the wallbase are three oval cells, entered by narrow doorways from the central area. These have beehive-corbelled roofs. The stairway leaves from a raised aperture, 2 metres above the broch floor, and runs spirally up through the hollow wall to the wallhead, where it opens onto a partially-roofed upper gallery. Within the double-skinned wall are six galleries, formed by levels of lintels which tie inner and outer wallfaces together. These are difficult to reach from the stairway, as this cuts through them, necessitating a gap in each gallery floor. The inner face of the broch has long, vertical, gaps in the masonry, broken by spaced tie-stones. These “voids” allow light into the galleries, lighten the structure, and may also have served, in conjunction with the two ledges which protrude from the inner face, to support a wooden structure of galleried form.

On the floor of the broch is a rock-cut tank for water, over which can be seen the remains of the wheelhouse-like building which was inserted at a later date. Outside the broch are slight traces of outbuildings, contained within a stone wall which runs across the neck of the promontory on which the broch stands. Guardianship monument. Restrictions imposed by access.

(Access is by private boat from Sand Lodge: details published locally)

86. *Levenwick, HU 416198. This broch is now rather ruined, but enough can be seen of the features to allow this site to be rated as the third best-preserved broch in Shetland. This diameter is small, only 17 metres overall. The interior, 8 metres across, has been further reduced by the insertion of a later circular house which was entered through a gap broken through the porch at the level of the first gallery. The original entrance to the broch is visible on the north-east, and to the right of it, on entering, is a cell which leads to a ruined stair. This ran up to the first gallery, which can be seen clearly, and a second flight of stairs led upwards from this gallery on the south side of the broch. These are visible, but there is no trace of the second, higher, gallery which was recorded last century. The broch stands on a low platform, faced with

masonry, and has been surrounded by two earthen ramparts, each of which has a cobble base. A small oval house stands to the west of the broch, within the outer defences.

(Downhill from the end of the road at Burgadies)

87. *Clumlie, HU 404181. This broch, revealed by excavation late last century, stands in the centre of a complex of croft buildings which are themselves of interest. The broch stands to just over 2 metres in height, and has been of similar proportions to that at Jarlshof. Part of the outer wall has been removed. There is a guard cell to the right of the narrow entrance, while a cell on the left may have led to a stair. On the floor of the broch can be seen the outline of a hearth and of stone subdivisions which may be original fittings rather than later additions. A later wall has been inserted, narrowing the interior.

(Within the deserted croft, west of the road below Braefield)

88. *Dalsetter, HU 408157. Only a large mound of rubble remains of the broch, but its surrounding ramparts are still most impressive. Two earthen banks stand up to 3 metres high, and between them is a broad, flat-bottomed ditch. A gap in these defences, on the south-east, probably marks the original approach. The remains from a prominent landmark for many miles, and the site is known as “da Brough”, in preference to all of the other local brochs, which simply have the names of their locality.

(On the hilltop north-east of Boddam)

(71) *Jarlshof, South Mainland, HU 399096. The broch, which lies in the centre of the coastal side of this complex site, has been half destroyed by sea. The remainder stands to over 2 metres, and can be seen in cross-section. The outer diameter was 19 metres, with walls 5 metres thick. The broch entrance, half removed, may have given onto a stair in the now vanished half of the wall. An outer wall, enclosing a courtyard around the broch entrance, was found to be contemporary. This had a guard-cell at the entrance, and marks a point mid-way between the Clickimin type of ring-wall and the broch proper.

The complex of post-broch structures here is one of the most remarkable in Scotland. The broch was closely followed by a stone roundhouse, built within the outer enclosure of the broch. This was followed by three wheelhouses, one of which was built within the broch itself, and the other two of which overlaid the roundhouse and enclosure wall. Two of the wheelhouses are substantially complete, with roofs

corbelled in to leave a small central hole for light and smoke. These structures, on both design and finds, seem to have developed on site, and Jarlshof may mark the point of origin of the Scottish wheelhouse.

After the wheelhouses, and at the beginning of the Pictish period, a series of slighter foundations mark the remains of sunken-floored, sub-circular houses, associated with two small souterrains which were probably stores. These houses may have been built of turf, with stone used for the foundations alone. Even later is a small house with a kiln-base, which stands to the west of the main complex. A group of poorly preserved circular houses directly underlaid the extensive Norse village, and these houses may have been in use when the Scandinavian settlers arrived.

The post-broch phase at Jarlshof is marked by rapid accumulation of sand, in a series of layers. By the time of the early Pictish houses, almost two metres had accumulated, and midden deposits had been built up to similar depths around the broch. The result is a very deep stratigraphy, and there are doubtless many more ruins of all periods on this site, both in areas unexcavated and in areas where the excavators stopped at relatively late, high, levels.

89. St Ninian's Isle, HU 368208. The ruins of the church on this island overlie an earlier chapel, within the floor of which, in a stone-lined compartment, was found hidden the famous St Ninian's Isle treasure, consisting of a large number of items of silver, worked in the Pictish style. It is worth remarking that there is little documentary evidence for even the later church, although the island seems to have been a holy place, for the graveyard was used over a long period of time, and even after the church was ruined, candles were lit upon the altar by persons seeking special favours. There is doubt about the exact date of the treasure, and whether it was sacred or secular property, but there can be little doubt that the early chapel, which was surrounded by a circular bank, was a major centre of the early Christian church in Shetland. This is supported by the discovery here of parts of stone, slab-built, altars or shrines.

(Track from Bigton to car park above beach, cross beach to site)

90. Papil, West Burra, HU 368315. The church at Papil, itself ruined, stands on a mound which represents the site of a much earlier church dedicated to St Laurence, which may have been the principal church of south Shetland in pre-Norse times. Little can be seen of this period apart from the curved bank which is part of a once circular enclosure. The

churchyard had produced a remarkable group of Pictish sculptured stones which seem to span a long period of time. Among the early pieces is the "Papil stone" a cross slab bearing an incised lion and two bird-headed men (Plate 5) and equally impressive is the side slab of an altar or shrine which carries a picture of four monks, one mounted, in procession. A number of other fragments suggest that, in its original form, this site was a circular enclosure with a small chapel towards the centre and a number of open-air shrines dotted about the churchyard. There may well be more remaining on site than is apparent, for the level of the ground has built up since the period in which the first church would have been built, probably as early as the eighth century.

(On the west side of the road at Papil)

(71) ***Jarlshof**, HU 399096. The extensive Viking period and later remains represent a long sequence of habitation, from the first Norse settlement through a later village and a medieval farm, and ending with a substantial dwelling of late sixteenth century date. The Norse structures are very complex, and better seen than described (Plate 6).

91. Catpund, Cunningsburgh, HU 426272. Some fine examples of soapstone working, with chisel-marks preserved on many faces. Most, if not all, of the visible working is medieval rather than Viking in date.

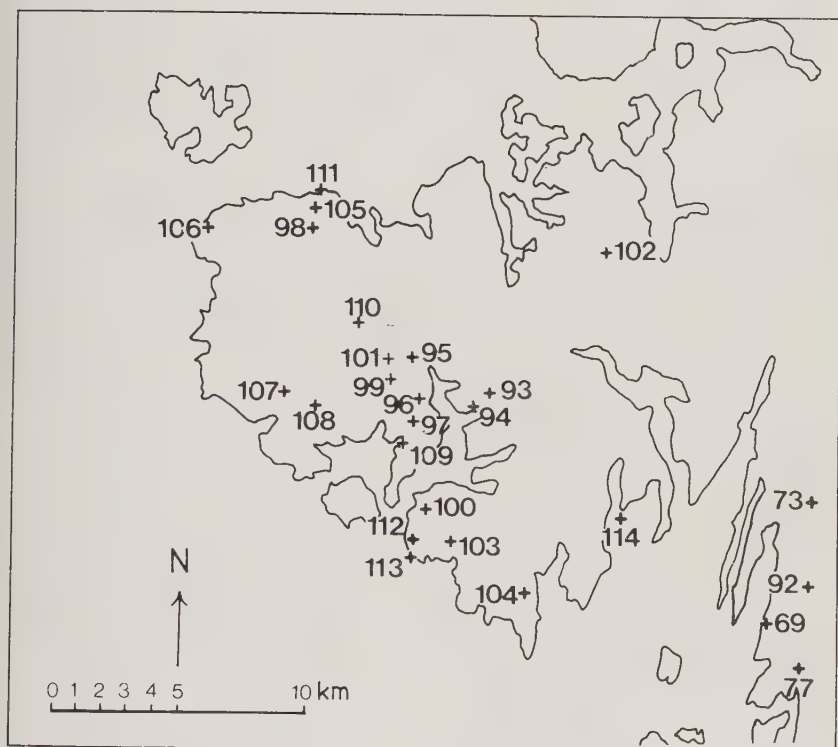
(The first burn of any size south of South Brig of Cunningsburgh (approximately 1km); the remains lie in the stream-bed)

92. *Law Ting Holm, Tingwall, HU 417435. The mound at the north end of the loch is reputed to have been the meeting place of the supreme assembly for all of Shetland.

(East of the road, at the north end of Tingwall Loch — Tingwall means "the valley of the Ting (parliament)").

WEST MAINLAND (Map 4)

93. *Stanydale, Gruting, HU 285502. The best known, although by no means the most extensive of the settlement areas in West Mainland Shetland, Stanydale is remarkable for the main site, which is a double-sized version of the oval transepted house. Three rather ruined oval houses of normal size lie near to the main building, while a fourth, which is in a clearer state, lies on the approach track. Numerous fragments of walling lie around the area, with a large number of grass-grown clearance cairns. A setting of upright stones curves round the south side of the main building, but is not of any distinct form, being neither stone



Map 4
Sites described in West Mainland

alignment nor stone circle. A number of cairns lie on hilltops to both north and south.

The main building has two post-holes in the centre, and may have been roofed, a formidable undertaking in wood-scarce Shetland. Its entrance is from the centre of a curved facade like that of the heel-shaped cairns, and the size and plan of the structure led the excavator to suggest that the building was a temple. It must certainly have been an edifice of some importance, and presumably some sort of gathering place, whether religious or secular.

The well-preserved house, which has been excavated, shows a variant on the usual plan, with a main oval chamber from which a small circular compartment runs off at the inner end. The entrance has been provided with a porch, or windbreak, curving around the doorway, which could otherwise have been exposed to the south-west. Pottery from this house and the "temple" suggest a long life, from Late Neolithic right through the Bronze Age. (Plate 1).

Guardianship monument, always open.

(Signposted and route marked by posts across moor, from road to Gruting, one kilometre south of the turn for Stanydale farm)

94. Gruting School, Gruting, HU 282499. A large oval house lying north of the head of Gruting Voe, this is the best-surviving member of a group of three houses. One of the others is bisected by the road, while the second lies below the garage beside the road. The house is a large oval, and was not transepted.

(North of the road, just above fork to Gruting School)

95. *Scord of Brouster, HU 255516.

96. Pinhoulland, HU 259497 and

97. Grunnavoe, HU 258494, Bridge of Walls area. These are the nuclei of a belt of early settlement remains running down the west side of the Voe of Browland. Brouster, recently excavated, has four houses, a possible square, kerbed, burial cairn, a system of interlinked field walls and over 100 clearance cairns. Pinhoulland has seven houses, a few short traces of walls and many cairns. Grunnavoe has three houses and many cairns. Between these are numerous scattered cairns and stretches of walling, often partly submerged by the peat. Associated with this assemblage of agricultural remains are a number of cairns, some of them chambered (see below). The main house at Brouster has massive

orthostats dividing the side alcoves, and dates to before 2000 BC, when it replaced an earlier wooden structure. Some of the cairns, which look small, have sub-peat basal diameters of over two metres. There is good evidence from this site that soils in the area were much richer during the settlement phase.

(Brouster lies to the north of the junction at Bridge of Walls, and the area runs south along the voe and over to Loch of Grunnaveo two kilometres away)

98. *The Spinner, Sandness, HU 215562. This circular cairn, of 8 metres diameter, seems to have been bounded by a kerb of large blocks. A central cist, 1.4 metres by 1.1 metres, can be seen, and is built of large slabs. This is probably a Bronze Age cairn, though any finds made when the chamber was dug out long ago have not survived.

(On hilltop to east of road before it descends to Norby)

99. Gallow Hill, Bridge of Walls, HU 257507. A 10 metres diameter cairn, of round plan, with a large cist or ruined chamber in the centre. The central structure, and the edge of the cairn, are built of very large slabs. A second, more ruined, cairn lies to the east.

(Clearly visible from the Walls road 200 metres beyond the turn for Sandness)

100. Ward of Culswick, Culswick, HU 263462. The inner chamber and entrance passage can be seen within the rubble of this ruined cairn.

(At north end of Vivilie Loch, 1 kilometre north-west of Culswick chapel)

101. Cattapund Knowe, Walls, HU 247516. Under the walls of a group of sheep-pens lie the remains of a long cairn. This has been reduced to a single course of stones, but can be seen to have measured some 15 metres by 40 metres. The long cairn may have been built by joining a pair of normal round cairns, and traces of a cist can be seen near the southern end.

(West of junction of roads to Sandness from Walls and from Bridge of Walls)

102. Greenmeadow, HU 325557. Two stones, one fallen, the other standing 2m high. When erect, they would have stood due east and west of each other.

(On low hill north of Loch of North-house)

103. Sotersta, Culswick, HU 263446. A slender upright of granite has been incorporated into the wall of an outhouse at the ruined croft, but seems almost certainly to have been an older free-standing stone.

(Among the ruins of the croft at Sotersta, 1 kilometre west-south-west of Culswick chapel)

104. Wester Skeld, HU 301433. This granite block, 2.8 metres high and up to 1.9 metres broad, is of particular interest due to the discovery nearby of a hoard of six polished porphyry knives of late Neolithic date.

(On hilltop between Wester Skeld and Scarvister)

105. *Crawton, Sandness, HU 214577. A very large burnt mound, of kidney-shaped plan, 16 metres by 14, and 1.5 metres high, this example stands beside a boggy area. There is no sign of a trough.

(North of the gate which stands at the end of the track to Ness)

106. *Huxter, Sandness, HU 173567 and HU 172565. Two large burnt mounds are clearly visible from the shore of Loch of Huxter. These burnt mounds are unusual in having acquired names which are not purely locational: the Little and Muckle Brownie's Knowes.

(South-south-west from the farm at Huxter)

107. *Burn of Setter, Mid Walls, HU 212505 and area. Five burnt mounds, all in a reasonable state of repair, can be seen in the valley of the burn.

(North of main road, before public telephone kiosk)

108. Burraland, Walls, HU 223497. A large oval burnt mound stands close beside the deserted crofthouse.

(Southern end of Loch of Burraland)

109. Grunnavae, Whitesness, HU 250488, HU 252486, HU 252493. Three fairly typical specimens of burnt mounds, all part way between oval and crescentic in form, and all slightly damaged by grazing animals.

(Respectively: beside the road to Whitesness; east of the road to Whitesness; in a slight valley running into the north-western end of Loch of Grunnavae)

110. *Burga Water, Sandness, HU 234539. An excellent example of an island dun, which has been preserved by its inaccessibility. Although the stonework is tumbled, enough survives to suggest a circular wall, just

over 2 metres thick, containing an area some 10 metres across. The outer wall stands to almost 2 metres.

(Clearly visible from the Sandness road as this crosses Stourabrough Hill)

111. *Ness of Garth, Sandness, HU 216583. This promontory fort has been cut off by the rising sea-level, and is now a tidal islet. On the landward side are the remains of two stone-faced ramparts, and a slighter walls runs around the western side of the enclosed area. There are small, possibly later, oval foundations within the fort, and the broken edge near one of these has produced fragments of Iron Age pottery. These foundations may represent a later use of the site as a monastic outpost.

(Track leaves the public road at Crawton, on the left just beyond the telephone kiosk)

112. *Culswick, Skeld, HU 253448. This broch once stood second in stature to Mousa, but in the last two centuries it has been reduced in height, though it still stands to about 5 metres. The lower part of both inner and outer walls is obscured by rubble, but the entrance can be seen on the south-east side. There is a small chamber above it, entered from inside the broch, and a gallery has run within the wall on the same level as this chamber. The entrance was also provided with a conventional guard cell to the right, and this has been broken open from the outside.

The use of intractable granite as a building material has led to two unusual features. The first is a large triangular lintel over the outer end of the entrance passage, designed to spread weight away from the rather poorly-built passage roof. The other is the use of single projecting blocks, rather than the more normal ledge, to support the now vanished internal wooden fittings. These blocks are about 3 metres above the original interior level.

Around the broch is a very ruined, but stoutly-built, stone-faced wall, similar to that at Clickimin, although on a smaller scale. The broch's position is particularly spectacular.

(On a hilltop overlooking the sea, west-north-west from ruined croft at Sotersta, west of Culswick)

113. Burki Stacks, Culswick, HU 256441. Two rock stacks, inaccessible from the shore, bear traces of foundations. The northern stack has a single small rectangular foundation, and is edged with low

banks. The southern stack has eight buildings, in a row, similar to those at Isbister.

(Off the shore, south of the broch)

114. Kirk Holm, Sand, HU 337460. Another site with a row of buildings, but here the structures are much larger, being up to 11 metres in length. They stand parallel, end-on to the shore. This seems almost certain to be a Norse period site, analogous to the Orcadian centre at Birsay, rather than a very early settlement of Pictish date.

(In voe to east of road to Reawick: site at north end of islet)

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